amateur filmmaking

the home movie, the archive, the web

edited by LAURA RASCAROLI and GWENDA YOUNG
with BARRY MONAHAN

BLOOMSBURY

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Introduction

Amateur Filmmaking: New Developments and Directions

Laura Rascaroli, Gwenda Young, Barry Monahan

Recent years have witnessed a new interest in the home movie among scholars and the broader public alike. With the publication of such volumes as *Reel Families* (Zimmermann 1995), *There's No Place Like Home Video* (Moran 2002), and *Mining the Home Movie* (Ishizuka and Zimmermann 2007), the home movie has, it seems, found its legitimate place in film and cultural studies. Undoubtedly this new concern is motivated and shaped by a complex array of sociocultural and ideological developments that include an upsurge in, and an increased relevance of, practices of self-inscription, self-representation and personal expression in the mass media, in the arts and on the Internet alike. The evolution and expansion of the concept of the archive—arguably spurred by the publication in 1995 of Derrida's *Archive Fever*—has led to an appreciation of its centrality within interdisciplinary contemporary thought. A greater emphasis on the importance of microhistories and on alternative, nonmainstream, private and communal practices of memorialization has allowed for an opening up of new research paths that, in turn, invite fresh appraisals of the significance of home movies and, more broadly, amateur film. The new appeal of amateur footage isn't simply confined to the realms of critical theory and cultural studies: after decades of neglect, old amateur films are now being recuperated, studied and digitized, sometimes incorporated in new films and artwork, and catalogued and repositioned within archives and repositories. In this age of digital technology, when short films can be uploaded to the Internet in a matter of minutes, amateur footage has never been so accessible to a wider public. No longer is the work of the home

moviemaker something to be viewed by family and friends or stored away, forgotten, in a dusty attic. Instead, as the popularity of such YouTube hits as "David After Dentist" (2009) and "Charlie Bit My Finger" (2007) attest, home movies have the potential to "speak" to a global audience. Incorporated into mainstream films (e.g. Andrew Jarecki's *Capturing the Friedmans*, 2003) and experimental work (e.g. Guy Maddin's 2012 *Only Dream Things,* which used his family's home movies as the basis for a short film screened at the Winnipeg Art Gallery), home movies and amateur footage have proved amenable to adaptation, appropriation, and recontextualization.

With the development of new technologies for the production, distribution and consumption of audiovisual content, the amateur moving image itself is also profoundly changing in terms of quality, nature and reach. Particularly on the Internet, but also increasingly moving beyond it, amateur film is challenging the way we think about entertainment, communication, creative filmmaking, and journalism. Anyone with access to a digital camera, a smartphone, or a tablet computer can shoot their own amateur film, and upload it to an instant audience. The apparent democratization of media is, of course, not without its concerns and limitations; but by placing the producer/consumer (or "prosumer") at the centre of contemporary audiovisual communication, there is potential for long-established power structures and ideological hierarchies to be subverted or, at the very least, questioned.

A reappraisal of the history of the home movie and amateur film is thus timely. As Zimmermann (2005) has explored, home movies and amateur films can be said to hold key, albeit often hidden, places not only in the history of cinema, but also in the history of art, culture, and society. Often underrated as a wholly private and, therefore, socially irrelevant phenomenon, and equally dismissed in aesthetic terms, or at least confined to the domain of amateur pictorialism, in the 1960s the home movie acquired new prominence, mainly through the work of such avant-garde and experimental filmmakers as Jonas Mekas, Maria Menken, Kenneth Anger, Stan Brakhage, and Maya Deren, who, in their practice and in their theoretical production alike (Deren 1965; Brakhage 2001; Mekas 1978), rejected the frameworks of professional cinema and tested the boundary between avant garde and amateurism, with a view to achieving full freedom of expression. At the same time, the documentary importance of amateur films came sharply into focus with the public release of the most viewed recording of John F. Kennedy's assassination, filmed on 8mm by Abraham Zapruder on November 22, 1963. The sociopolitical impact that private footage can make has been further demonstrated by more recent examples, perhaps most iconically the beating by the police of Rodney King, videotaped in Los Angeles by bystander George Holliday on March 2, 1991, which played an important part in triggering the Los Angeles riots of 1992. By the same token, the most affecting and eloquent images of recent conflicts

and events, from 9/11 to the Arab Spring starting in 2010, have been produced and often distributed by amateurs. Increasingly, prosumers replace professional journalists and the public has come to rely substantially on amateur videomakers and activists for uncensored information from conflict zones.

Over the past few decades, the practice of incorporating private home movies in experimental film and video, and of embracing amateurism as artistic expression, has resurfaced powerfully, with artists such as Michelle Citron, Alan Berliner, Rea Tajiri, and Daniel Reeves, among others. Yet the appeal of amateur footage and home movies to professional filmmakers is not simply limited to avant-garde practitioners. Carving out careers that extend over four decades, auteurs such as Péter Forgács and Joseph Morder have produced serious documentaries, imaginative fiction films, and playful subversions of genre that incorporate amateur footage or give home movies a whole new meaning. Both Morder and Forgács are at the forefront of some of the most interesting films to emerge in European cinema in recent decades and, in recognition of this, their work is the subject of three chapters in this new collection. For many more mainstream filmmakers, such as Andrew Jarecki (*Capturing the Friedmans*) and Brian De Palma (*Redacted* (2007), the incorporation of home movies and amateur footage serves to challenge notions of "truth" and "perception" and reminds us of the bearing that amateur footage has on social consciousness today.[1]

Even films that do not happen to capture significant events and historical moments, however, but focus instead on domestic settings, private occasions, or everyday scenes in the public sphere, have become valuable documents. Through these, the customs, values, identities, practices, rituals, and historical realities of generations of amateur filmmakers are preserved. What makes them so relevant today is precisely what previously relegated them—their ephemeral, private, marginal, and personal nature. As a result of the waning of the myths of authority and objectivity as compelling social narratives, alternative, subjective, and contingent accounts of reality have today become more persuasive and appealing. Microhistorical approaches place emphasis on mundane documents such as amateur films in retracing historical accounts from below.

One of the effects of these epochal shifts in technologies, practices, perceptions, and interests is the reconfiguration of the field and the emergence of new, pressing research questions, which in turn require the mobilization of novel interpretative frameworks. *Amateur Filmmaking: The Home Movie, the Archive, the Web* offers a new exploration of the amateur moving image today, one that appraises the plurality of its forms and embodiments. Crucial to this is the adoption of a dynamic multidisciplinary methodology that incorporates postcolonial studies, microhistorical approaches, semio-pragmatic analysis, poststructuralism, cultural studies, archival studies, and film and

new media studies. With examinations of the personal, communal, local, and national histories that the amateur image has recorded, and assessments of its past and current technological developments, this collection strives to be simultaneously broad and focused; varied and thorough; multifaceted and coherent. The chapters in this book engage with issues of identity, nation, individual and communal histories, self-representation, performativity, aesthetics, ethics, technology, ideological processes, censorship, experience, authenticity, mediation, and participation.

The volume is organized into six parts, each comprising a number of chapters that complement each other, and that create an intense dialogue both internally, within the book, and with work and critical frameworks from other disciplines and fields of research. Part One, "Reframing The Home Movie," is especially concerned with theoretical approaches to amateur cinema, from the semio-pragmatic analysis of contexts of communication to explorations of ideas of nation and national cinema, and issues pertaining to aesthetics, ideology, technology, and society. Roger Odin's chapter "The Home Movie and Space of Communication," explores the notion of "space of communication," by adapting his well-established semio-pragmatic theories of amateur filmmaking and documentary. In his analysis, he suggests that the "space" of home movies has often been constructed as a familial one in which constraints are placed by a specifically patriarchal structure over the family unit. Thus, the family home movie is often managed by the father who presides over aspects of family life, too, and is generally responsible for the (re)construction of family history, and its attendant mythologization. Odin proposes that this was the common reading of home movies produced when the patriarchal family was still a structuring element in bourgeois society; now, however, as family structures change, and technology develops, the content and reception of home movies also alters. Odin argues here that contemporary television and its codes of interviews and other talking-head formats are molding and dictating how people now make home movies; often they are movies *on* the family, but not *of* the family. In his chapter, Odin also touches on the archive's new interest in home movies; films that offer a microhistorical perspective on society and culture not usually offered in news and other related media.

In her chapter "Home Movies and Amateur Film as National Cinema," Liz Czach describes the importance of home movies for archivists and historians, noting especially cases of the reverence and attention given in countries where there has not been a strong tradition of structured film industries. She argues that many examinations of national cinema, such as those proposed by Higson (1989; 2000) and Crofts (1993; 1998), have adhered to a model that privileges narrative filmmaking (often in relation to Hollywood) over other modes. Offering a more optimistic approach for future research, she points to

the work of Jerry White (2004) who has called for the incorporation of studies of alternative filmmaking modes into accounts of national cinemas. With this positive prospect informing her core argument, Czach then proposes a division between "amateur films" and "home movies," arguing that the former are usually more "polished," have wider subject matter, and are thus more likely to be easily integrated into discourses of national cinemas.

In "The Photographic Hangover: Reconsidering the Aesthetics of the Postwar 8mm Home Movie," Maija Howe examines postwar changes in North American amateur filmmaking advisory literature; catalogs and manuals that were designed to offer assistance to aspiring producers on issues of aesthetics and technique. She identifies a discrepancy in attitudes between writers of these user manuals (who urged filmmakers to exploit the film medium in all of its potential and differences from still photography), and the approaches of users who exhibited an overreliance on applying conventions drawn from still photography (what Howe calls the "photographic hangover"). Howe demonstrates that advisory literature of the period often posited arguments for medium specificity, which seemed largely ignored by many amateur filmmakers (especially home moviemakers). She argues that "photographers and photographic subjects accustomed to the 'hold-it' technique of early photography simply continued to employ this convention in their motion-picture practice" (44) and that this photographic hangover also threatened to undermine notions of continuity and attendant editing.

The holiday home-movie footage shot by the Jackson family from Indiana in the 1940s forms the basis for Mark Neumann's chapter, "Amateur Film, Automobility and the Cinematic Aesthetics of Leisure." In it, he explores the aesthetics of their filming as the family traveled along Route 66 and considers the different approaches that the group took to filming various subjects. He also addresses broader issues, such as the links between filming (observing, recording) and travel, and draws parallels and connections between the touristic gaze and the anthropological and ethnographical gazes. Arguing that the economic costs involved in filming on 8mm meant that filmmakers had to edit before they shot, he suggests that amateur moviemakers of the time developed an "aesthetic of economy" that is quite different to today's amateur practitioners.

The second part of the volume, "Private Reels, Historiographical Concerns," comprises chapters that are particularly attentive to the interface between private and public history, as well as to broad historiographical concerns, which are profoundly unsettled by the "view from below" provided by amateur cinema. In the chapter "Cinemas of Catastrophe and Continuity: Mapping Out Twentieth-Century Amateur Practices of Intentional History-Making in Northern England," Heather Norris Nicholson explores an active

sector within the amateur filmmaking community, taking relevant case examples from specific moments in the history of Great Britain. Sometimes working as individuals and sometimes in informal collectives, these nonprofessional cine-producers were enthusiastically engaged in the production of footage and the provision of news material reporting on events that were deemed of interest to local audiences. While these newsreels were used to document victories of local sports teams and other carnival festivities for historical posterity, frequently their subject matter offered images of regional natural disasters or man-made catastrophes, such as fires in buildings, train derailments, and other tragic incidents. Norris Nicholson's chapter offers a specific—and extended—case study in reference to the work of Kathleen Lockwood (1908–97), whose documentation covered significant moments of British history through her amateur newsreel production.

In "Glimpses of a Hidden History: Exploring Irish Amateur Collections, 1930–70," Gwenda Young examines a selection of amateur film collections from the Irish Film Archive that were digitized as part of a recent project funded by the Irish Research Council and involving a collaboration between researchers at University College Cork and the Irish Film Archive. Examining three collections that offer intriguing snapshots of life in Ireland between 1930–70, she argues that these films can offer us valuable insights into the history of class and the role the Catholic Church played in the shaping of the nation and its formation of (an often exclusionary) collective identity. She also offers some analysis of why individuals, in a society that has often been represented as private and insular, choose to record their private lives on screen. She looks at the work of Margaret Currivan as both typical (in terms of the content of much of her footage) and unusual (in her sophisticated grasp of aesthetics) of Irish home moviemakers of this period.

In "Uncensored British Imperial Politics in Late Colonial Home Movies: Memsahibs, Indian Bearers and Chinese Communist Insurgents," Annamaria Motrescu-Mayes examines amateur films made by colonial settlers in India in the 1930s, and by a British officer in Malaya during the 1957 rebellion. She argues that these films (which have previously been overlooked in official discourses) reveal much about the dynamics and performances of colonial identities (both colonizer and colonized). She argues that examining the work of amateur filmmakers can enhance our understanding of imperial history, and also raise questions about how gender might play a role in determining how imperial identities were constructed and represented. With reference to films shot by Ladies Kendall and Dalyell in India in the 1930s, and Capt. Wilson in Malaya in the 1940/50s, she examines how the subjects of the films were frequently gender coded. She suggests that, at first glance, it may that seem that women filmmakers in imperial India were, by the very fact of embracing a hobby that brought them out of the domestic sphere and into public life,

challenging traditional gender roles. Yet such a step, she argues, may have been mainly in service to Empire; to maintaining and reasserting, rather than subverting colonial ideologies.

In "The Amateur Film: From Artifact to Anecdote," Karen Lury offers an in-depth analysis of *The Chief's Half Day*, an amateur film produced in Scotland in 1961 detailing the life of a celebrated police chief, William Merilees. She demonstrates how excavations of the production history of the film, as well as of details of the lives of the subjects, help to provide a nuanced understanding of a film that, at first glance, seems obscure and eccentric. She suggests that the film's amateur style—with ellipses, lapses in continuity, poor sound—and its lack of clear context, mean that the challenge for the contemporary viewer is twofold: how to make sense of the narrative of the film, and how to establish a meaningful context for it. She interrogates the film as both artifact and anecdote (for the former she cites Ginzberg and Kracauer, for the latter, she uses Stefanovska, Grossman). As she considers the amateur artifact, Lury problematizes notions of the construction of biographical narrative based on visual details.

Janna Jones's chapter—"Starring Sally Peshlakai: Rewriting the Script for Tad Nichols's 1939 *Navajo Rug Weaving*"—excavates Tad Nichols's fascinating footage of Navajo life and work in the American Southwest of the 1930s. She offers a rich account of the production history of his film, *Navajo Rug Weaving* (1939), and gives insights into the collaboration between Nichols and his subjects. Both Nichols's film, and the details that Jones unearths about its making (the relationship between Nichols and his subjects, and the motives behind its production), raise crucial questions about how such films are classified and about the power play between the filmmaker and his subjects. As she notes, many ethnographical films are heavily coded, often imposing an ideologically fixed touristic/voyeuristic gaze on the subjects they portray, however the case of this film is more complex. Jones shows that archival research can furnish contextual material that aids the historian in producing a more nuanced reading of a film.

The chapters in the third part, "Nonfictional Recontextualizations," engage with both broad and specific theoretical, aesthetic and ethical issues surrounding the use and recontextualization of amateur footage in nonfictions—a topic currently of great interest in documentary film studies. In his chapter, "Change of Scale: Home Movies as Microhistory in Documentary Films," Efrén Cuevas evaluates the relative merit of amateur home movies in the construction and representation of a "history from below." Often at variance with the forrmerly established official histories in either print or cinema, these constructed accounts of microhistories and diurnal events provide a rich set of narrative alternatives in the production of sociological and cultural historiography. Cuevas analyses a number of films that represent

the lives of families in various historical contexts: films by the directors Péter Forgács, Michal Aviad, and Sandhya Suri provide for the textual analysis of diasporic and familial identities that display historical contexts and ethnographic experiences.

Barry Monahan's chapter—"Creating Historiography: Alan Gilsenan's Formal Reframing of Amateur Archival Footage in *Home Movie Nights*"—explores the historiographical interrogations that take place in Alan Gilsenan's documentary series *Home Movie Nights*. He proposes that certain formal qualities of the programs—most notably the juxtaposition of complementary and mismatched aural and visual tracks—facilitate a reopening and exploration of the mechanisms in the creation of historical narratives and memories. Broadcast at a time (mid-1990s) when historical aspects of the nation were being put under scrutiny, this timely documentary offers the construction of personal/private, and political/public historical stories as fluid, ideologically open for renegotiation, and politically volatile.

Stefano Odorico focuses on the inclusion of amateur stills and clips in Errol Morris's 2008 documentary *Standard Operating Procedure*, which offers an investigation of the Abu Ghraib scandal triggered by the publication in 2004 of a series of photographs of horrifying tortures inflicted by U.S. soldiers on Iraqi detainees suspected of terrorism. In his chapter "'That would be wrong': Errol Morris and His Use of Home Movies (As Metalanguages) in Feature Documentaries," Odorico argues that the film is not about the "real story" behind the scandal, but about reaching an understanding of the value and meaning of the notorious Abu Ghraib photographs. Framing his analysis in a semio-pragmatic approach, Odorico interrogates the effects of the inclusion of the rarely seen amateur moving and still images in the context of the communicative situation established between the enunciator and spectator of a nonfiction film. Engaging with Susan Sontag's and John Berger's reflections on violence and photography, he argues that the home-movie clips of the tortures, unlike the still images, cannot be so easily assimilated to the thousands of images of violence that surround us and that cease to affect us.

Part Four, "Amateur Auteur," probes questions of authorship vis-à-vis the theoretical understanding of amateur cinema, and offers concentrated studies of the work of three very diverse but outstanding filmmakers: Péter Forgács, Joseph Morder, and Jonathan Caouette. The work of Hungarian filmmaker Péter Forgács comes under scrutiny in two essays by Richard Kilborn and Ruth Balint. In his chapter "'I am a time archaeologist': Some Reflections on the Filmmaking Practice of Péter Forgács," Kilborn shows how the filmmaker's work is powerfully affecting in its quiet insistence on the importance of the private, the individual, the ordinary, framed against an extraordinary background. He offers an overview of Forgács's oeuvre, and identifies some of the key cinematic devices used by the director: his

recurring themes and techniques, and his microhistorical approach to the retelling of history. Following this consideration of Forgács's artistic project, in "Representing the Past and the Meaning of Home in Péter Forgács's *Private Hungary*," Ruth Balint moves the focus to the broader backdrop of *Private Hungary*'s (1988–97) evocations of the past, and of Hungarian history and culture during the Second World War. She notes that *Private Hungary* is an example of how Forgács adopts a microhistorical approach to his retelling of history, using home-movie footage to uncover the complex lives of individuals caught up in the turbulence of war. For historian Balint, Forgács's work offers a particularly rich vein, echoing as it does "the core project of the historian, in which the evidence becomes the kernel for new ways of imagining the past" (196). She suggests that Forgács's use of cinematic devices (such as freeze-frame, slow motion, and other techniques) enables him to intensify "the mnemonic quality of the original footage" (197). She also explores how richly the bilateral aspect home-movie footage provides for historical review: how it incorporates both the mundane details of private life and the covert filming of public events (such as the deportation of Jews, crowds hailing Hitler, and other political events and public gatherings).

By imbricating considerations of the philosophy and practise of France's most prolific amateur filmmaker, Joseph Morder, Dominique Bluher's chapter "Necessity Is the Mother of Invention, or Morder's Amateur Toolkit," explores how various technologies and methodologies have facilitated Morder's extensive body of cinematic work. Though inspired by mainstream Hollywood directors such as Douglas Sirk and Vincente Minnelli, Bluher argues that Morder is never an amateur to shy from formal innovation or the possibility of finding aesthetic liberation and inspiration in the limitations imposed upon him by technologies, errors or other contingencies. Bluher offers a close reading of a number of Morder's films, beginning with a study of his Cinémathèque française-celebrated 1973 production *Avrum et Cioporja*; a biographical narration about his grandfather and his second wife, both of whom were Holocaust survivors. Bluher presents a formal consideration of other celebrated films from Morder's portfolio: *Mémoires d'un Juif tropical* (1986), *L'arbre mort* (1988), and *Assoud le buffle* (2002), all of which combine elements of mainstream cinema with innovative stylistic interventions more typical of the amateur palette. The chapter on Joseph Morder is the first major English-language analysis of this outstanding and prolific author, an important figure in French filmmaking who has influenced directors such as François Ozon, but one who still waits to be fully discovered outside of France. Bluher's piece is followed by an exclusive interview with Joseph Morder, who talks about his filmmaking techniques and his philosophy of the amateur.

Taking Jonathan Caouette's *Tarnation* (2003) as a productive case study and a key example of contemporary DIY filmmaking, in her chapter "Working

at Home: *Tarnation*, Amateur Authorship, and Self-Inscription in the Digital Age," Laura Rascaroli reflects on digital platforms as new technologies of the Self, and on their impact on the traditional definition of amateurism. Against the backdrop of the features of self-inscription that are shaped by digital technologies, including narcissism, hybridism, fragmentation, and instability, Rascaroli examines the amateur excess of *Tarnation* and Caouette's self-inscription within the film, in the context of the Surrealist heritage. Her reflections on the increasing professionalization of the home as workspace, and on the digital videomaker's identification with his or her technology of representation, contribute a theoretical reframing of the nexus of amateur and auteur in the context of the current proliferation of self-portraits and autobiographical performances facilitated and shaped by the digital turn, thus also anticipating some of the themes explored in the rest of the book.

The fifth and final part of the volume, "New Directions: The Digital Age," investigates contemporary evolutions of technologies, forms, and ideas of amateur filmmaking, from DV to YouTube, from new archival practices to Web 2.0, from first-person documentary to mobile filmmaking. In "Saving Private Reels: Archival Practices and Digital Memories (Formerly Known as Home Movies) in the Digital Age," Susan Aasman argues that archival documents can no longer be considered simply as passive objects locked away in repositories, but as active agents that continue to play a role in society and in different sociological contexts. By referencing the writing of Terry Cook, she details four successive archival frameworks covering the last 150 years. In the first, the preserving archive is seen as the guardian of some form of empirical "truth"; subsequently it became a collecting repository of history; and later in the century it was seen to provide evidence of peripheral histories from below. In the contemporary period, archival documents are posited as active participants in the creation of polyvocal and multilayered narratives that both create and protect our cultures and histories. Her chapter concludes with an interrogation of the consequences for memory of new digital technologies and Internet facilities.

In her chapter, "The Home Movie Archive Live," Patricia Zimmermann celebrates the radical historiographical reopening that occurs when home movie archives go "live." She concentrates on four relevant ventures: the 2007 multimedia project *Memescapes* by Ann Michel and Phil Wilde; the 2005 projection *Dismantling Empire* by Art Jones and Simon Tarr; the Yves Dorme installation *Images Cachées* designed for the Luxembourg Centre national de l'audiovisuel; and the *Magical History Film and Video Bus Tour* established during the Miami International Film Festival in 2002. Historical representations are no longer set, immobile, fixed and dormant, but dynamic, mutating, energetic, and transformative cultural projects. Cultural "texts" that were once immobilized on archive shelves are reinvigorated within new

contexts of presentation and, with that, otherwise closed historiographical moments are reanimated in "fluidity, permeability, intersubjective exchanges, [and] processes" (260).

Tianqi Yu's chapter—"An Inward Gaze at Home: Amateur First Person DV Documentary Filmmaking in Twenty-First Century China"—explores the interface between private and public worlds by placing the film *Family Phobia* by contemporary Chinese amateur filmmaker Hu Xinyu against the backdrop of a changing Chinese socioeconomic era, traced to the early 1990s. Yu points to the ways in which the banalities of diurnal events and interactions in the family home represented in the film echo, and become motivated by, political realities in the changing society of modern China. The chapter goes on to evaluate the ethical implications of the exposure of private spaces, dialogues, and contacts in a society once so heavily policed and state-controlled.

Lauren Berliner discusses the migration of home movies to the web, focusing specifically on one YouTube "phenomenon," "David After Dentist" in the chapter "Shooting for Profit: The Monetary Logic of the YouTube Home Movie." Berliner examines how it is that some "home movies" seem to have an extraordinary impact while others are overlooked. She suggests that much of the most successful footage uploaded is consciously shaped to meet generic expectations from an audience weaned on "prank" home movie shows such as *America's Funniest Home Videos*. She identifies some of the conventions associated with this "genre" and outlines how producers (on the shows) and YouTube help to shape content. She argues that the potential for monetary gain (adverts run alongside the footage) is undoubtedly a lure for amateur filmmakers to upload their work to YouTube, a consequence that already blurs the lines between the amateur and the professional.

In "Home Movies in the Age of Web 2.0: The Case of '*Star Wars* Kid'," Abigail Keating offers a contextual case study of the YouTube phenomenon "*Star Wars* Kid," a short video created by the Canadian schoolboy Ghyslain Raza in which he plays at enacting a *Star Wars*-like sequence using a golf club as a "lightsaber." His footage was subsequently appropriated by some of his peers, modified, and posted on to YouTube. Keating's analysis brings together questions of authorship and ownership, technologies of production and dissemination, and ethical issues under the implied rubric of public and private domains. Technical developments within the field of amateur film production, which Keating demonstrates to be increasingly inflected by professional aesthetics and formal qualities, are here shown to facilitate alterations to the original footage.

In the final chapter of the collection, "Towards Mobile Filmmaking 2.0: Amateur Filmmaking as an Alternative Cultural Practice," Max Schleser considers developments across the history of amateur filmmaking resulting from technological innovations and variations in the mobility of "pro-d-users."

He shows how new technologies have provided a refreshing hybridity of production styles at different historical junctures, bringing very real changes to mainstream cultural and industrial practices, and concludes that the amateur aesthetic can even offer a critically useful alternative to industrial modes of production and dissemination.

The chapters presented in this volume are informed throughout by questions of methodology, and by a sustained engagement with interdisciplinary theoretical and critical frameworks. Together, they successfully support the collection's ambition to respond to the shifts in practices, technologies, and perceptions that continue to impact on the field of study, and that have brought a new and unprecedented relevance to amateur moving images worldwide.

Note

1 The boundary between amateur and professional has never been more porous and radical experiments in amateur filmmaking can present challenges to, if not subversion of, the hierarchical structures of the film industry. A case in point of the increasing ability of user-generated content to move beyond the Internet is Kevin Macdonald's *Life in a Day*, which premiered at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival. Executive-produced by Ridley Scott, the film is composed of amateur footage uploaded on YouTube on July 24, 2010 by thousands of people around the world.

PART ONE

Reframing the Home Movie

1

The Home Movie and Space of Communication

Roger Odin

Translated by Barry Monahan

The aim of this chapter is to show how the notion of "space of communication" can assist an understanding of the functioning and the evolution of the home movie as well as what happens, from a communicational point of view, when the home movie circulates in contexts other than that of the familial.[1] Within my semio-pragmatic approach (2000a, 2011), a communication space is a space through which the harness of constraints directs the Transmitter and Receiver—the actants of the communicational process—to produce meaning along the same axis of relevance. Here are the questions that we should necessarily ask ourselves as we set out to analyze a context in terms of communication space. What communication space is to be constructed? Which axis of relevance should we choose for this construction? What are the determining factors at work in the space? What is the *operator* of communication? How are the actants that work within the space constructed? How does the production of meaning, of affects, of relations actually work?

The home movie within the family institution

Here, I'm interested in the home movie inasmuch as it manifests itself in the communication space of familial memory; this is my axis of relevance, certainly a very important axis: through creating connections between the present and the past, memory is the element that ensures the internal cohesion of the family unit. This particular communication space is historically grounded.

The traditional familial space

In the first instance, there was the bourgeois patriarchal family that was prevalent in the years from 1945–75, the great period of familialism (Zimmermann 1995, 122–3). This structure can be described as a combination of constraints that regulate the actants in a given space. Within this structure, the father has a particular position; it is he who directs the formation of familial memory; it is he who oversees the building of the cemetery grave; he who orders the painted family portraits; who takes the photographs; and, obviously, it is he who shoots the films. Concerned about continuity down through the generations, he will organize important rituals of family reminiscing, at which these films will be screened: at birthdays, at rites of passage (such as first Holy Communions, marriages, retirements), etc. It is he who will oversee the (re)construction, by family members, of the family history, a history more or less mythological that works, from an outsider's perspective, as the official history and, from the inside, as a mechanism for the establishment of consensus; or at least as a mechanism for the establishment of an apparent consensus. On this level, it is the Family (the family as a structure) that is the actual Enunciator of the work of memory: concerned with its preservation, the family institution ensures that its harmony will be disturbed by nothing. The paternal censorship also works as self-censorship: in the home movie, there are things that should not be shown.

The family, however, is not simply a structure; it is also an assembly of individuals, and one should not consider its relation to familial memory without also bearing this duality in mind. Another familial memory also exists, profoundly individual, and also more underground. This memory is not more liberated than the former, but its constraints are not as relevant to the group as to the individual himself or herself. This hidden memory that works in the deep interior of every individual stimulates a textual production that is remarkably different from the preceding one, a production very often with a dysphoric tonal quality: it is precisely there that old animosities reveal themselves, older conflicts between members of the family, all of the taboos that make up the dark side of the family.

The net effect of the existence of these two memories is that, in order to scrutinize the operation of the home movie, we cannot, as the anthropologist Richard Chalfen (1987) has done, hold onto a model comprised of a single mode: the "home mode." Rather, two modes must be constructed, which correspond to the two types of memory located: the "private mode" and the "intimate mode."

By private mode, I mean the mode by which a group (in this case, the family) revisits its past. With the private mode, we enter into a state that

Edward S. Casey (1987) calls the "reminiscing" (7): going about reliving the past by invoking it in a collective way (we speak a lot among ourselves during the projection of a home movie). Here, the communication is exteriorized and thus falls directly under the constraints (the censorships) of the family structure. The effect of this is that the screenings presented within this mode are strongly normalized (every home movie seems identical to every other home movie ever made) and, for the most part, these utterances have a euphoric tone. Another effect is that what is said (the film as textual production) is often less important than the very fact of its being said: the importance lies in the exchange between the actants who participate in the communication.

By intimate mode, I mean the mode by which I recollect my own life and reflect upon the family's past. During the projection of a home movie, the intimate mode happens by means of an interior dialogue: there is no externalization of communication. It is pointless to insist upon the force of effects that motivates this internal projection and upon the role that it plays in the construction of the individual's identity; a construction that comes into being because of a differentiation from other individuals.

As an operator of communication, contrary to what seems to be at the core of its distinctiveness, the home movie is not or, more exactly, should not be considered a "film"—that is at least if we call a film a structured production with specific communicative goals, and with a beginning and an end. While the home movie is designed as a film, it displays the history of the family from the point of view of the one who has made it (generally, the father), a perspective that might not necessarily be accepted by other members of the family: they might have to struggle to rediscover their own lives in it. To work well, the home movie should be made like a random succession of scenes only offering snippets of family life from which each family member might be able to reconstruct the family history in his or her own way: in short, it should be much less of a vehicle for, than a stimulator of, memory, or, in other words, using the "cinema film" as a comparison, the home movie works well when it is badly made (Odin 1995d, 1999). Therefore, we are unjustified in considering amateur home moviemakers as bad filmmakers: what they do is conform to the constraints of the space of communication within which they function. This point may be summarized as follows: when one makes a home movie, one must not act as an actual filmmaker.

Considered *a contrario*: if one makes a home movie as an actual filmmaker, it immediately becomes a source of conflict among family members (the conflict is the sanction that marks the transgression of the constraints of the space of communication). Krzysztof Kieślowski's film *Camera Buff* (*Amator*, 1979) tells the story of Filip Mosz (Jerzy Stuhr), who, little by little, is

overwhelmed by the compulsion to make cinema with his family (he presents his family) and who, as a result, loses his wife and child.

Ultimately, if making a home movie is not making a film, what exactly does it mean to make a home movie? It seems to me that the answer is as follows: to make a home movie is to create an album of moving photographs. Here are three points to support this answer. Argument one: on the levels of aesthetics and content, the home movie presents the same family events and calls upon the same stylistic features as does family photography (the pause, the front-on shot, the looks at the camera, the group photo, etc.), but now in motion. The ethno-methodological argument: the one who makes the home movie does not consider himself as an actual filmmaker, but more readily as a photographer. Hervé Guibert (1981) quotes a comment made by his father after a screening of one of the family's home movies: "You must be disappointed, they're only *animated family photos*" (51; emphasis added). In the case of the home movie, we are in the photographic strip, not in the cinematic strip—where "strip" is defined as: "an activity happening … seen from the perspective of those who are subjectively tied up in it" (Goffman 1991, 19). Thirdly, the structural argument: the home movie presents a succession of life moments separated by gaps in time of varying sizes (from a few minutes to several days, even several months); these moments are frequently unconnected, apart from the fact that they belong to the history of the family; we are caught in a chronological sequence, but not in the narrative. This is precisely the structure of the family photo album.

This construction of the operator aims to adapt it to its function in the family communication space. The interest in formulating the home movie as a family photo album is twofold: not only does this construction allow a personal relationship between each member of the family and the family history (each one can find in it his or her lived experiences, because no narrative structure has been superimposed onto it), but it also drives the gathered members of the family towards a collective reconstruction of this history, because it is necessary for them to fill the narrative gaps. The home movie, like the photo album, works usefully as a relational operator as well as a textual operator.

Analyzed in this way, the operation of intergenerational communication in the family seems to have, above all else, an ideological function: it favors the cohesion of the family unit in order to reinforce familialism and to preserve the institution in its traditional formation.

A new family structure, a new space of communication

In the course of history, the structure of the family has produced changes in the space of communication: hierarchical constraints have weakened,

individuals have stood up to institutions, and personal relationships have come to outweigh kinship (something that we often call the "chosen family"). At the same time, an unprecedented technological expansion has come to have a direct effect on the operators of the familial memory space, simultaneously on the levels of production and reception: development of television, which has shown itself to be an excellent teacher of audiovisual language—now, everybody knows how to film and even display his or her work; the shift from celluloid film to videotape, then to digital; the ability to capture direct sound, with the appearance of the tiniest image and sound recording devices; the evolution of the mobile phone and the computer; and the development of the Internet. Even if we want to avoid technological determinism, it is nevertheless certain that these evolutionary factors have changed the technological constraints; at the same time, we will notice that they provide tools adapted to the new family structure.

The result of the weakening of the institutional constraints at the heart of the family is that new intergenerational productions do not shy away from revealing aspects of family life that had heretofore remained taboo. In a split from the cheerful demeanor of familial images, the family is now presented "as it is"; of course with happy moments, but now also with all its moments of pettiness and all its instances of rivalry and conflict, which are inevitably a part of every group dynamic. The introduction of directly recorded sound further enhanced this development. As it is always much more difficult to control the sound than the image, especially when the voices are out of frame, things are being said in these new productions that it would have been unthinkable to hope to have recorded before: words that might best be forgotten, unpleasant remarks, negative comments that undermine all of the positive ones, vicious whispers, etc.

Above all else, our relationship with intimacy has changed. The alterations of institutional constraints as well as the evolution of technology facilitate our shooting everything. In Atom Egoyan's film *Family Viewing* (1987), a son discovers that his father erases the family's home movies in order to film himself making love with his mistress. Self-filming has emerged. In one particular advertisement for a Samsung camera, a woman lying on her back holds a video camera in her outstretched hand, pointing it back onto herself; the tagline reads: "It's my film, it's my life." As far as I am aware, no advertisement for amateur cinema has ever used self-filming as a sales pitch. With very small cameras, and especially with the mobile phone, a new line has been crossed. These devices will inevitably introduce their owners to a true relationship with intimacy (we always have them in our pockets, we hold them in our hands): self-filming is becoming a regular action (we trust our mobile phones the way we used to trust our soothers).

Nowadays, it is not only the father but all of the family members who take photographs and films of the family. The fact that everyone now has access to easily used devices makes this possible. This basically facilitates the proliferation of productions made from different viewpoints: from the father's perspective, from the wife's take, but also from those of the children who have their own recording devices (most frequently their mobile phones). An individual structure of enunciation takes the place of the collective structure (the one of the family). In the new familial structure, the photo album *of* the family and the film *of* the family are being replaced by a multitude of photographs and films *on* the family.

A new mode of meaning production thus emerges; a mode that comes to add itself to, and not to become a substitute for, the private and intimate modes: the testimonial mode. The testimonial mode has at its core a Subject, an "I," who, in the process of the production of a text (written, oral, image and/or sound), gives its perspective on what it sees or on what it has seen; in this case, on the life of the family. The most significant trait of the testimonial mode is that it requires a fundamental evaluation of identity (who are you in bearing witness to this event?), of doing (where were you at the moment of the events?), and of truth, a truth for which the author of the testimonial is held accountable. We are far from the production of consensus that we had seen in the example of the earlier familial structure. New intergenerational productions now invite debate, discussion and even conflict among members of the family. The family is, all the while, a space of openly explicit tensions. It is not necessarily the case that this will lead to a fragmentation of the family space all of the time; often we can see in this a process of bettering relationships, and a beneficial alteration to the structure of the institution.

If, in the earlier space, the constraints of the family structure regulated the position of the operator, now the constraints are informed by the language of television. Films are now produced based on televisual codes and conventions: interviews with family members, use of the zoom lens drawing attention to one detail or another (the "zoom lens action" is a very powerful semiotic pointer), and oral commentaries by the cameraman remarking upon one situation or another. These productions are very often edited: people play with various shot transitions that make logical sense, they make interventions into the film, or they combine sections of film with photographs. The home movie has become a film about the family: we can call it the "home video" (Moran 2002).

These productions are no longer uniquely viewed inside the familial sphere, but also among partners, friends, close associates, even among all of the unknown "friends" whom we might encounter on websites like Facebook. Numerous videos of this kind are effectively uploaded onto the Internet, either in personal blogs or on shared platforms, contributing to the general

melting pot of combining public and private spaces that is so characteristic of contemporary society. Patrice Flichy (2010), calling upon a notion offered by the psychologist Serge Tisseron, has spoken about an "extimate space" (45). Tisseron (2001) calls "desire of extimacy," "the movement that pushes everyone to put some part of one's intimate, private life out there" (52). These videos actually bring up as much, if not more, about self-expression, as they do about familial productions. All the same, if they manage to evade the constraints of the family, it is really only to fall back under the pressure of other constraints: editorial and economic models that regulate these platforms of social contact, constraints of which the authors of these productions are not always completely aware.

Alterations are also becoming evident on the level of operators of reception. Nowadays, home movies and photographs can be viewed on the television screen, on the computer, or even on the mobile phone screen. One could think that the movement of the image onto increasingly smaller screens basically favors viewing by individual users, but this is only partly true. Not only are films and photographs seen on small screens within the family immediately after they have been shot, but the camera and the mobile phone are also passed readily from person to person. As far as the traditional photo album is concerned, the mobile phone even facilitates an expansion of the family circle to absent ones, bringing people from far away into range. Even more than the notion of an individualization of spectatorship, it appears to me that the essential development here lies in the fact that, on these screens, I watch many other things than simply family productions: football matches, televised news, variety shows, video games. Furthermore, I send emails, deal with my bank account, and even fill in my tax forms on the same devices. Consequently, not only do family productions lose their "sacred" aspect, but they become banal. Their proliferation undermines their significance all the more. Previously, we had a relatively small number of images to call upon as worthwhile substitutes for memory; nowadays, their vast quantity forces us to archive and classify them obsessively on the computer; to arrange them, to put them in order of importance (there is even software available to help us with this). This represents a fundamental change in logic: we are in the system of functional logic, in the system of databases.

The consequence of this is that the notion of home movie as operator seems inappropriate to these new productions: it is no longer the case that we are dealing with familial productions created by the Family Enunciator, but with individual productions within a communicational horizon that goes far beyond the family circle. In fact, we are in front of a new space of communication. I propose to call it the "ego space of communication."

Two examples of migration

I would like now to show how the notion of space of communication can help us in explaining what happens to the home movie once it has migrated beyond its original context. The home movie has, effectively, a remarkable history of exportation across extremely diverse contexts; I will offer two chosen examples, selected both for their importance and their methodological significance.

From archives to places of memory

The most noteworthy example of familial audiovisual productions going beyond their institution of origin is most certainly the establishment almost everywhere across the world of specialized archives, or at least the opening up of special sections dedicated to these productions in larger archives, including, among others, the Cinémathèque de Bretagne; Vidéothèque de la Ville de Paris; Médiathèque de Saint-Étienne; The Film Archive of Andalusia, Cordoba; Filmoteca Vasca-Euskadiko Filmategia, San Sebastián; Musée d'Ethnographie de Genève, Conches; The Scottish Screen Archive, Glasgow; Smalfilmuseum, Hilversum; The New Zealand Film Archive; Österreichisches Filmmuseum-Austrian Filmmuseum, Vienna; Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center, Cambodia; Finland's National Board of Antiquities; Viborg Stiftsmuseum, Denmark; and The Human Studies Film Archives of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.

Their significance as documents justifies this dissemination of familial productions into archives around the globe. Read within the documentary mode (Odin 1995d, 2000), effectively they import valuable topics of information on whole vistas of societies that have never been documented by official information sources or through professional reporting. Most importantly, they are unequalled in worth when it comes to recording what happens when nothing is happening, "the banal, the diurnal, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the sub-ordinary, the noises from beneath, the habitual." Georges Perec (1975), from whom I am borrowing this list, makes the point that "newspapers talk about everything except everyday life," and asks: "What is actually happening when we are only living, the rest, everything else, where is it?" Then he starts to dream of an "endotic" (as opposed to "exotic") anthropology (251–5). The familial filmmakers are, in their own way, endotic anthropologists by default. Without thinking about making actual documents, they film certain moments of life, which the professionals do not film (because they do not merge with the space of communication in which they work).

The institutions that gather these productions, however, more often than not, are regional archives or cinema museums, which, under these titles, are submitted to specific constraints: most noteworthy is the fact that they are involved in issues relating to regional identity. During screenings that are more or less ritualized, we get together to share a common history and to show our sense of belonging to a particular community; the production of meanings and effects, therefore, creates a relationship with group memory. We are no longer in the documentary mode, but in the private mode. The relational aspect of communication becomes more important than the production of meaning. Archives turn into *lieux de mémoires*, places (realms) of memory (to quote Pierre Nora's series of books). The main reason that donors give to explain their willingness to bequeath films to archives is to contribute to a collective regional memory.

The choice between the documentary mode and the private mode depends wholly on the state of the actant who is interested in these films. Whereas the locals from the region visit the archive as members of the community (private mode), researchers (historians, sociologists, ethnologists, anthropologists) and curious visitors predominantly mobilize the documentary mode; the question of verisimilitude is essential for them. Of course, the same individual can participate in both actant roles simultaneously.

Following on from the fact that the production of meaning conforms to one or other mode, we can suppose that it is not the same operators who are mobilized in each case. When the private mode is dominant, we find the same kind of operator as we have found in the family, but on the broader level of community (a town or a region): the films as stimulants of memory and of relations. The importance lies less in what they show or say, than in the labor of memory to which they give rise, and the link that they create (or reinforce) between the recipients. Contrary to this, when the documentary mode is prominent, the same films are treated as vehicles of information, and the operators have an entirely different position: they are the tools that allow us to reconstruct the past in a way that is more or less systematic, reasoned, at a distance that memory does not allow: analyzing operators. These analyzing operators are different, depending on the disciplinary area within which meaning is produced: historians, scientists, ethnographers, anthropologists do not use the same theoretical or methodological tools.

To sum up, audiovisual family productions in this context are inscribed inside two communication spaces. On the one hand, the *communication space of the document*: the production of meaning is made there with the documentary mode; the communication actants behave like researchers, using analyzing operatives to produce information films. On the other hand, there is the *collective space of memory*: the film operator here works as a motivator (private mode) and the actants behave as members of a community.

It is, of course, possible that these spaces appear autonomously from each other but, more often than not, an intersection occurs: the old miner who comes to the Médiathèque of Saint-Etienne to attend a screening of amateur films from the 1950s will undeniably be moved by the projections' memorial and communal qualities, but at the same time he will most certainly learn something about the town. Equally, the historian who is working on a body of family films to study the lives of miners in the Loire valley will, in order to expand his or her research, doubtlessly feel the compulsion to delve into his or her memory and the memory of those who have lived the events depicted.

The home movie on television

After the archive, undoubtedly the most significant phenomenon in terms of the movement of family productions beyond their originating context is their ongoing, persistent appearance on television: in news slots, in magazine programs, in historical documentaries, in chat shows (television can rarely present a writer, a painter, a sportsperson, a politician, or a general expert without including extracts from his or her home movies), not to mention the "prank home movies" genre of television shows (for example: *Vidéo gag*, France 1990–2003).

If we put aside the prank home movies examples, the migration of the home movie might be described as a movement into the space of the document and therefore as an invitation to read the productions through the documentary mode. Without being disingenuous, this way of thinking misses what is important: outside the fact that the informational content of the fragments broadcast is usually extremely weak, this migration can only be understood if we place it back in the context of the movement from paleo- to neo-television; in other words, within a framework of a structural change, and therefore in opposition to the very interior functioning of television itself (Casetti and Odin 1990). In the 1980s, economic and political transformations effectively led television to give license to a specific kind of relationship with the viewer: a relationship of proximity takes the place of the (hierarchical) pedagogical relationship that was characteristic of paleo-television. The recourse to familial productions is bound up in a prolonging of this movement: they work like an operator of proximity. For example, in offering me the experience of seeing the home movies of celebrities, the television brings me closer to them because their home movies are similar to my own. The production of meaning is made therefore within the intimate mode: I will look into my own life for what I am sharing with these people. A relationship of empathy can be established.

Even more than their content, however, it is the origin of these images that is significant. The directors of these programs make this very clear (often using the caption: "amateur images"), most certainly to highlight the poor quality of the images, but more so because the mention of their provenance works like an enunciating operator, inviting me to see these images as images that have been filmed by people like me (as opposed to professionals). From that moment on, these images speak to me in a different way: they command a very specific and effective influence, a power that forces me to accept them as they are, without questioning the truth of their allegations (their origin is the proof of their integrity). I call the authenticity mode the mode which, while it requests that I construct a real Enunciator, prohibits me from interrogating it in terms of truth. As such the authenticity mode is contrary to the mode of documentary.

The important thing is grounded in the notion of pushing the viewer to apply the mode of authenticity within the space of the document, a space where the documentary mode is compulsory. The mode of authenticity undermines the documentary mode from the inside: it has nothing to do with the question of truth. It seems to me that in this situation we have one of the great functions of the use of audiovisual familial productions on the television, but also in several other contexts: an attempt to restrict the possibilities of the emergence of a critical inquisitiveness among spectators.

It is equally typical of the authenticity mode to make something other of the prank home movies programs than a mere broadcast for sheer entertainment, a space to which it belongs however without any ambiguity. It appears that the Japanese program *Kato-chan Ken-chan Gokigen TV* (1986–92) was the one that started the prank home movies format in the mid-1980s. With variations, it has appeared more or less internationally with examples such as *America's Funniest Home Videos* (U.S.A., 1989–present), *You've Been Framed* (U.K., 1990–present), *Drôle de vidéo* (Canada, 1990–2000), etc.

These programs are made up of a specific reduction of the home movie to gags. The operation is both simplistic and extraordinarily effective: sections of home movies are chosen to show funny moments in a sequence: trips and falls, smacks, weddings, animal and children's mishaps, etc.; sound effects are added along with an audio commentary (often in the form of a dialogue) to enhance the comical nature of the situations. Fragments of home movies are thus modified so that they will be read within the mode of the spectacular: on the surface, they have no function beyond making us laugh. At the same time, within the reception space, things don't always occur as candidly as this: the mode of the spectacular is definitely a part of the presentation, we undeniably laugh heartily at them, but what is being played out goes well beyond mere cheap laughs. It is a fact that the depiction that I see on the screen actually resembles me (I am represented) and this works in three ways: in how I perform gags; in how I am responsible for filming the images; and in how I decide to send the films

to the television program. This particular enunciative relationship is coming to contradict the effect of distance of the spectacular mode; it pushes me to use the mode of authenticity and to acknowledge the incontestable veracity of the images presented to me: these series of gags give me one complete image of others and of myself, as ridiculous, grotesque and, all in all, deplorable. Prank home movies is not an innocent format: not only does it make me take part in a universal foolishness, but even worse it invites me to accept it, without discussion, taking pleasure in an exercise of basic self-contempt.

These analyses come together around the same conclusion. The different uses of home movie inside the television realm belong to the same space of communication: *the space of authenticity*. By encouraging a self-contempt (prank home movies), by blocking any possibility of interrogating the extent of truthfulness (the documentary space), the dissemination of the home movie into the televisual realm is playing an ideological role: as an instrument for the reduction of critical consciousness. In doing that, the home movie returns to one of its primary functions within the familial space: avoiding problems, creating consensus, and perpetuating the position of the institution. The familial productions offer themselves so naturally to the mode of authenticity that we may actually talk of a *home movie effect* in order to designate that relation to the film spectator characterized by the relegation of the question of truth.

In this chapter, I have analyzed what happens to family productions inside three contexts: the family, the archives, and the television. Doing so, I felt the necessity to propose five communication spaces: the space of home movies (the familial memory space); the ego space of communication; the documentary space; the collective memory space; and the authenticity space. Each space has a specific position depending on the context in which it is at stake. The ego space of communication is the result of the transformation of the home movie space proceeding from historical, technological, and sociological modifications of the family context. The documentary space and the collective memory space are both necessary to understand what's on inside the context of archives; though they can work separately, they very often intersect. We find the documentary space also inside the televisual context, but included inside the authenticity space that is dominant each time home movies are used in this context. To conclude, I must emphasize that these spaces are theoretical constructions, heuristic tools (sets of questions) that I use for the purpose of the analysis: to describe the specific *experience* lived by the actual actors who are involved in the different contexts.

Note

1 See Odin (2011). The present chapter is based on Chapters Four and Five of this work.

2

Home Movies and Amateur Film as National Cinema

Liz Czach

There is little doubt that the mid-1990s was a watershed moment for archivists and scholars in the discovery and appreciation of amateur films and home movies. In her 1994 study of film archives, Penelope Houston noted how "many of the older archives, both in North America and Europe, have discovered considerable enthusiasm for amateur films, home movies in all their manifestations" (118). A year later, Patricia Zimmermann's groundbreaking study, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* appeared, and regular discussions regarding small-gauge film archival issues were taking place at the annual Fédération Internationale des Archives du Film (FIAF) conference, culminating in the 1997 edition, titled *Out of the Attic: Archiving Amateur Film.* Fast-forward a couple of decades and it is evident that amateur films and home movies have moved irrevocably on to the agenda of film scholars and archivists.[1]

Undergirding these efforts is the now undisputed claim that amateur moving images are an important part of a country's visual heritage. The belief that amateur films, along with other non-theatrical and marginalized film forms such as educational, industrial and scientific films, should be considered a part of a nation's film culture is now firmly entrenched. Indeed, the stated importance of amateur films takes on a particularly strong resonance in countries where more mainstream forms of filmmaking (narrative feature films, documentaries, etc.) have been found wanting or absent. Thus, it is unsurprising that at the 1990 FIAF conference in Havana "the thesis was advanced within the organization that, in the absence of an indigenous commercial film industry, amateur film could constitute a national cinema" (Horak 1998a, 50). In the intervening years this argument has gained much

momentum as countries that experienced a delayed entry into commercial filmmaking construct an alternative narrative to that of mainstream cinema and reclaim their amateur cinematic heritage. For example, it has been noted that "the scarcity of professional fiction and documentary films in Luxembourg, where no real film industry existed prior to the 1990s, triggered the initial interest in amateur footage" (Kmec and Thill 2009, 7). Ireland's *Capturing the Nation* project is likewise a response to a similarly perceived lack.[2] Ciara Chambers (2010) contends that:

> the portrayal of Ireland on film has been problematic due to a lack of a sustained indigenous film industry until the 1970s. Prior to this, in narrative filmmaking, Ireland was depicted from the outside by Britain and America … However, throughout this time amateur filmmakers were capturing events which hold valuable clues to the internal social and historical perspective on 20th-century Ireland. (60)

Similar work has been undertaken in the analysis of amateur cinemas in the national and subnational contexts of Wales and Scotland (see Shand 2006). These important interventions in the archival recovery and study of amateur moving images raise broader methodological considerations about what it means to reconceptualize national cinema through amateur films. Does the way that film scholars have traditionally formulated the study of national cinema allow for it to be re-viewed through an amateur lens? I will address this question broadly while occasionally turning to Canadian national cinema, the tradition I am most familiar with, as a test case for some of the theoretical and methodological quandaries that seeing amateur film in this way might present.[3]

Amongst the most cited and influential discussions of national cinema are undoubtedly Andrew Higson's "The Concept of National Cinema" (1989) and "The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema" (2000), alongside Stephen Crofts's "Reconceptualizing National Cinema/s" (1993) and "Concepts of National Cinema" (1998). This quartet of essays has established the groundwork for much of the debate on national cinemas. It is beyond the scope of my discussion here to elaborate on the finer points of these works and their detractors, but rather I wish to highlight a general tendency that proves a stumbling block for their utility in rethinking national cinema through an amateur lens: each of these essays, in fact, fails to conceptualize a national cinema as anything other than a cinema of narrative feature filmmaking. Furthermore, these narrative traditions are positioned primarily in their relationship to Hollywood. Thus, when Higson (1989) calls for an understanding of national cinema to "take into account the film culture as a whole" and to examine "the range of films in circulation within a nation state" (44), he

is not calling for an inquiry into the different filmmaking traditions that might be practiced in any one country, but rather a broad spectrum of narrative feature films, both domestic and foreign, that are in evidence. Similarly, Crofts (1993) admits that his essay limits "itself to the feature film" (49). By restricting to their purview feature films, Higson and Crofts's offerings impoverish their ability to account adequately for the robustness of a national cinema. Under this dominant formulation of what constitutes a national cinema, the amateur film does not even register as a viable or important part of a country's film culture.

In contrast to this restrictive approach, Jerry White (2004) argues for a more diverse understanding of national cinema—one that would incorporate more than just feature films. He writes:

> A standard for such diversity that I would propose—fully acknowledging its tentative quality—is that a national cinema generally has the following sectors: feature-length narrative (commercial), feature-length and short narrative (semi-commercial/independently produced), documentary (independent or government-subsidised), avant-garde (fully non-commercial), political/Third Cinema. (225)

This definition, while markedly more expansive, still does not account for amateur films, home movies, or any other kind of non-theatrical, educational, medical, or sponsored film, thus raising the question: if the vast and growing literature on national cinemas consistently fails to account for a large swath of film production practices, why insist on using national cinema as an interpretive framework? Largely because amateur films and home movies are increasingly collected, examined, and valorized, as the above examples of Luxembourg and Ireland attest, as reaffirming the nation through a cinematic presence. The appeal of digging into the amateur archive is precisely in its allure as the repository of images of the nation *par excellence*. In explaining the keenness of British archives in collecting amateur footage, Penelope Houston (1994) contends:

> Archivists are prepared to sit through footage of babies on beaches, nervously posed wedding groups, jokey dashings about suburban gardens, for the nuggets of authentic social history which might otherwise go unrecorded, the story of life through the years of a family or a town, of the films shot by enthusiasts in, for instance, colonial civil service, recording ways of life in areas where the professionals never ventured. It seems also to be felt that amateur footage is somehow purer, more authentic, less subject to manipulation for commercial or political ends. (118)

What Houston points to is the manner in which these amateur images are privileged for their content, that is, as documents of social history rather than as aesthetic objects. Whether these images are indeed of national importance, historically or culturally, requires further consideration. As Andrew Higson (1995) points out, one of the key approaches to national cinema is "much more evaluative from the outset, allowing only certain aspects of the full range of cinematic activity in a particular nation-state to be considered under the rubric of national cinema" (5). This evaluative tradition is evident in the privileging of auteurs making art films. National cinema histories are predominately written as historical surveys of great films made by acclaimed directors and are thus seemingly at odds with the amateurish-ness of amateur films and home movies.

At this juncture we should take a closer look at the terms "amateur film" and "home movie" with the aim of clarifying what kind of film productions are inferred and consequently what these differences mean for thinking through their place in national cinema. "Amateur cinema" has been an expansive category used to cover a broad swath of filmic material including most forms of nonprofessional films made on non-standard gauges (16mm, regular 8mm and Super 8mm). An equally prevalent term is "home movie," which may include any film displaying nonprofessional or home-mode production values as well as films that record daily life set in the domestic sphere. While neither of these usages is necessarily inaccurate, I propose a continuum of nonprofessional film production that traverses a spectrum from amateur film on one end to the home movie on the other. Amateur films demonstrate preproduction in terms of planning and preparing for the film as well as postproduction techniques, such as editing and the addition of sound. At the other end of the spectrum we find less polished home movies produced through casual leisure that demonstrate a "point and shoot" aesthetic. The following table outlines some of the differences between the two modes at either end of the continuum.

Amateur Films	**Home Movies**
Serious leisure	Casual leisure
Aesthetically ambitious	Home mode
Carefully constructed	Unedited ("point and shoot" aesthetics)
Identifiable genres	Apparently genre-less
–narrative films	Seemingly plot-less
–travelogues	
–experimental	
Authored (title cards, etc.)	Often difficult to attribute (no titles, orphaned)
Potential aesthetic significance	Potential cultural or historical significance

When we look more closely at the specificities of the films on this continuum we can start to discern the manner in which amateur films that are aesthetically crafted, have an attributable author, and partake of an identifiable genre, are much more likely to be integrated into an existing model of national cinema. Since amateur films are more liable to adhere to a "great-filmmakers-making-great-films" formulation, they can be recuperated and positioned with an aesthetic/auteurist model of national cinema. On the other end of the spectrum are less polished home movies of unknown provenance that exhibit a more careless aesthetic (flash panning, cut-off heads, out-of-focus shots, etc.). These latter films may prove of interest as social documents with cultural or historical significance but are not necessarily valued as aesthetic objects.

Two films inducted into the American National Film Registry amply demonstrate the opposite ends of this small-gauge filmmaking spectrum and the different ways in which nonprofessional films can be significant to a nation's cinematic heritage. In 1994, the Zapruder film (1963) of President Kennedy's assassination, undoubtedly the best-known home movie in film history, was inducted into the Registry. Although the film is clearly attributed to Abraham Zapruder, this is not an auteurist effort. It is clear that the film was intended as a straightforward documentation, a simple "point and shoot" home movie of the President's visit to Dallas. It was circumstance that led to Zapruder being in the right place at the right time to record the tragic shooting. Timing, rather than impeccable planning, elevates the film to national significance. Taking a different tack, the Registry inducted amateur filmmaker Sid Laverents's *Multiple Sidosis* (1970) in 2000 as a technically accomplished film that masterfully splits the screen into 12 component parts with accompanying sound. *Multiple Sidosis* is a pre-digital-age wonder and one of a larger oeuvre of films that Laverents produced over a prolific career. While both of these films are important to the national cinematic heritage of the U.S., they fulfill different aspects of the criteria as established by the Library of Congress, which stipulates that films considered for the Registry must be "culturally, historically or aesthetically significant" (2012). The Zapruder film is without a doubt historically important, while *Multiple Sidosis* is aesthetically significant. Taking into consideration how my proposed spectrum of nonprofessional filmmaking converges with dominant models of national cinema, it is my contention that films displaying the serious amateur's polished professionalism, that is, films that are aesthetically significant, will more readily be integrated into a national cinema narrative. Conversely, the home movie is unlikely to be valued for its aesthetic contribution to a national film canon. And while specific home movies, such as the Zapruder film, may be historically important, films of such national significance are rare.

Returning to the proposition set out at the beginning of this chapter—that in the absence of a commercial film industry amateur film might constitute a national cinema—the Zapruder film and *Multiple Sidosis* make it clear that in the context of the United States (a country whose commercial film industry dominates the global market) the recuperation and incorporation of home movies and amateur films works principally to broaden the parameters of cinematic heritage and not as a primary constituent of a national cinema. This example suggests that there are multiple ways to recuperate the history of amateur films and home movies, depending on the specific nation in question. In what follows I will look principally at Canadian national cinema to examine different approaches to repositioning amateur films and home movies within a nation's cinematic heritage.

The history of Canadian cinema can be roughly divided into three significant eras. In the first period, from 1895–1939, film production was limited to industrial shorts as well as government-sponsored documentaries promoting tourism, immigration, and trade. When feature films became the international norm by the mid-teens there were some intermittent attempts to start a commercial film industry with the completion of the occasional narrative feature film (Morris 1978). However, the poor critical and commercial reception of most of these films thwarted efforts to establish a sustained and viable industry. The second era began in 1939 when John Grierson founded the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), a state-funded film production agency. Grierson was vehemently opposed to "movies," a form of filmmaking he negatively associated with Hollywood entertainment, and consequently the NFB focused on nonfiction filmmaking with an emphasis on documentary, animation, and educational productions.[4] There was little attempt at the NFB to venture into narrative filmmaking and it wasn't until 1963 that the board released *Drylanders* (Don Haldane), its first English-language narrative feature. The third noteworthy era begins with the founding of the Canadian Film Development Corporation in 1967 (renamed Telefilm Canada in 1984), a government organization tasked with investing in Canadian feature film production. In brief: until 1960 only 100 features were produced in Canada, with 100 in the following decade. Thus, prior to 1970, industrial, educational, and sponsored films dominated Canadian cinema.

It is clear from this briefly outlined history that Canadian cinema experienced a delayed entry into commercial filmmaking. However, any attempt to reclaim home movies and amateur films as Canadian national cinema must be mindful of the strong tradition in educational, industrial, and other nontheatrical film productions, particularly given the rich output of the NFB of Canada. That is, even in the absence of mainstream narrative films, amateur films and home movies do not solely constitute, but rather augment, Canadian national cinema. The following examples will make apparent that it is easier to reclaim

amateur films (as aesthetically significant) than it is to salvage home movies (that may be neither aesthetically nor historically significant) given the persistence of the auteur/aesthetic model.

The era prior to the founding of the NFB in 1939 is particularly fecund for retrieving lost filmmakers, given the paucity of production in the country at this time. During this period, the work of amateur filmmakers plays a particularly vital role in fleshing out Canada's cinematic history. One such significant filmmaker was Leslie Thatcher, an amateur filmmaker from Toronto who was an active member in the Amateur Cinema League (ACL). During the 1930s his films, such as *Another Day* (1934), *Fishers of Grande Anse* (1935), and *The Technique and Principles of Sinai Anaesthesia with Nupercaine* (1939), routinely placed in the annual ACL sponsored Top-Ten ranking.[5] *Another Day* is an accomplished impressionistic experimental film. The film's display of technical expertise, polished form, and critical achievement make it easily recoverable within a discourse of national cinema that privileges aesthetic value. *Another Day* was very successful on the amateur film circuit in the 1930s and was screened across North America, leading Charles Tepperman (2009) to argue that Thatcher was the most important Canadian filmmaker working in the 1930s. Indeed, Tepperman's study reclaims Thatcher, not only as a significant filmmaker in Canada, but also as a noteworthy contributor to the interwar North-American avant garde.[6] Thatcher displays the sensibility of the serious amateur and his oeuvre can be easily incorporated into a revised Canadian film history since his films demonstrate avant-garde aesthetics, were critically well received, and are artistically meritorious. He can be positioned as an auteur adhering to traditional aesthetic and auteurist models of national cinema.

The fact that Thatcher has not actively been integrated into Canadian film history can be partially explained by the fact that he worked in the marginal forms of avant-garde and documentary filmmaking and he failed to "crossover" to professional filmmaking. At the same time that Thatcher was active in the ACL, other amateur filmmakers would eventually parlay their experience into professional careers. Thus, another approach to incorporating amateur film into a national cinema is to reclaim and properly contextualize the amateur histories of these films and filmmakers that are already part of the canon. In Canada, two of the most prominent and successful filmmakers, Norman McLaren and Budge Crawley, started out as amateurs. Both McLaren and Crawley started making amateur films in the 1930s and went on to long and productive professional careers: McLaren as an animator at the National Film Board of Canada and Crawley as the proprietor of one of Canada's most successful private film production companies, Crawley Films, that specialized in educational, documentary and sponsored films. Additionally, each would also go on to win an Oscar for their filmmaking efforts. McLaren and

Crawley's filmmaking illustrates how amateurism overlaps and is intertwined with professional filmmaking.

Norman McLaren proudly laid claim to his amateur beginnings as a student at the Glasgow School of Art. In a talk titled "Experiences of an Amateur Filmmaker," given at the Royal Photographic Society in London in 1936, McLaren (1996) unabashedly claimed his amateur roots in describing the experience of making two animated films including *Camera Makes Whoopee* (1935). "I was an amateur for about four years," he stated, "before becoming a professional, and in my spare time I still carry on amateur work, on substandard film, because, although an amateur is limited in technical equipment, he has a freedom in certain respects which is not possessed by a professional" (31). McLaren's breakthrough came at the Scottish Amateur Film Festival where John Grierson, presiding as a judge, initially met him. Grierson would first invite McLaren to work at Britain's General Post Office, and then in 1941 convinced him to move to Canada and join the NFB. McLaren would work there for the next four decades, becoming one of the most innovative and prolific animators in the world and perfecting new approaches to animation such as painting and scratching directly on film and pixellation. A key moment in McLaren's career is undoubtedly his winning of the Oscar for best documentary short for his animated pacifist film *Neighbours* (1952).

Also emerging on the amateur filmmaking scene in the 1930s was Frank Radford "Budge" Crawley, who received a movie camera as a present on his sixteenth birthday in 1927 (Wade 1998, 33). His father hoped that the camera would be used to record and to help improve Budge's swimming stroke. Budge, however, was smitten with moviemaking and planned to embark on a filmmaking career. By the 1930s, Crawley was an active member in the Amateur Cinema League and often submitted films to their annual film competitions: his 1937 submission, *Glimpses of a Canoe Trip*, was awarded an honorable mention. In 1939 he submitted another film, *L'Île d'Orléans,* to the competition, which he had made with his wife Judy on their honeymoon. The film went on to win the Hiram Percy Maxim Award for best amateur film of the year beating out, amongst other films, Leslie Thatcher's *The Technique and Principles of Sinai Anaesthesia with Nupercaine* (1939).[7] Although trained as an accountant to please his practically minded father, Budge's success in filmmaking convinced his father to bankroll a production company. Crawley Films became the most successful independent private filmmaking company in Canadian history, producing over 5,000 films from its founding in 1939 until it was sold in 1982. Despite the bread and butter of the company being educational shorts, Crawley did undertake feature-length productions, producing the narrative films *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* (Irvin Kershner, 1964) and *The Rowdyman* (Peter Carter, 1972) while winning an Academy Award

for best documentary in 1975 for *The Man Who Skied Down Everest* (Bruce Nyznik and Lawrence Schiller, 1975).

The examples of Leslie Thatcher, Norman McLaren, and Budge Crawley illustrate the manner in which amateur films can be easily incorporated into a national cinema model underpinned by auteurist and aesthetic considerations. Yet, most nonprofessional films were not made by serious enthusiasts nor do they adhere to specific genre conventions or display stylistic ambitions that make them easily recoverable within a dominant model of national cinema. In fact, the vast majority of films available to researchers and archivists is produced in what Richard Chalfen (1987) identified as the "home mode"; films made in a casual manner to record domestic life. Unsurprisingly, two of the key studies that investigate home movies, Patricia Zimmermann's *Reel Families* (1995) and Chalfen's *Snapshot Versions of Life* (1987), approach home movies through social historical and anthropological perspectives respectively. Thus I return to the conundrum that I introduced at the outset of this chapter: if nonprofessional films are increasingly seen as the repository of images of the nation *par excellence*, how can home movies become a useful artifact of cinematic heritage? Penelope Houston (1994) recounts archival scholar Victoria Wegg-Prosser's suggestion that it is possible that things have gone too far in the collecting of this material. "Is the home movie material that is in the NFTVA [U.K.'s National Film and Television Archive] catalogued? Do the present generation of people know exactly what is there? Has anyone looked at it? … It's fashionable, it's available, but is it ever going to be useful?" (199).

The challenge of integrating home movies into the discourse of national cinema is much trickier than amateur films, and current scholarship on small-gauge filmmaking reflects this. The orphaned home movie can be a stubbornly resistant text, particularly when it seems to lack storytelling principles or generic considerations and comes from an unknown source. At best, the film may have historic value, but the question of a home movie's provenance is still integral to its use as an artifact of national cinematic heritage—the question of the film's origin and author (even if not used primarily to bolster a claim of auteurism) is important in confirming the historical data (at a minimum to confirm when and where the film was shot). The following example illustrates one typical example of a home movie collection and how it was handled.

In 1999, a Toronto film collector and exhibitor sorted through a box of film that had been given to him a few years earlier. In the box were six rolls of pristine 16mm Kodachrome reversal film. They depicted the everyday domestic life of a wealthy Toronto family from the late 1930s through to the early 1950s. The six 400-foot reels were labeled with dates and locations that provided some minimal clues to their origin. But like so much home-movie footage that is found at flea markets and estate sales, the identities of the

filmmaker and the family documented were unknown. Shortly after their rediscovery, the reels were edited together in roughly chronological order and dubbed *The Catherine Films*, after the young girl who appears in them and whose name is evident on some of the film labels as well as on the inscription on a cake in a birthday party sequence. While knowing Catherine's first name rescued her from complete anonymity, the identity of the film's other subjects, as well as the filmmaker, remained a mystery. A local filmmaker, John Porter, undertook the onerous task of locating the film's owner. After making frame enlargements of the family home depicted in the film, Porter used old city street maps and bus route records to locate the house. The family had moved, but the current owners had contact information. Porter found the little girl Catherine, depicted in the film and now a grown woman, and discovered the filmmaker was her father, one James Dauphinee (Porter, 2000).

Although the films are nicely composed and technically accomplished, the footage is consistent with the kind of material found in many home movies—trips, holidays, vacations, and special events. *The Catherine Films* depict the events of childhood and family life. Catherine is shown riding her tricycle, roller-skating, playing on swings, etc. Trips are duly documented: rail trips to Banff, a trip to Quintland, Parliament Hill in Ottawa and vacations in Muskoka. Christmas holidays are recorded and requisite scenes of gift openings filmed. Special events are of interest, and we can see glimpses of Toronto bedecked in Union Jacks in celebration of the Royal Visit in 1939. As social history *The Catherine Films* are an important document recording both ordinary lives (birthday parties, Christmas, etc.) and moments of historical significance (the Royal Visit), but as films within a national cinema rubric they were precariously close to being lost as they were, for a time, authorless, and they don't follow any particular genre formulas. Films that cannot be subsumed into the discourse of auteurism and/or genre filmmaking are likely to be deemed of little aesthetic value, and their historical value is contingent on their proper contextualization including indications of author, time, and places depicted. This was possible in this case due to the expert sleuthing of one intrepid filmmaker, but such time, effort, and dedication can hardly be expended on each orphaned collection.

To date, reclaiming small-gauge filmmaking has contributed to a broader spectrum of films gaining legitimacy as part of a country's film culture and expanding the horizons of a nation's cinematic heritage. Yet, most of these efforts fall comfortably within the prevailing understanding of a national cinema with identifiably authored amateur films of aesthetic significance being the first and easiest to recuperate. The stray home movie proves much more resistant and a future challenge will be to develop models and methodologies to draw out their significance in new and innovative ways. As the call

to review national cinema through an amateur lens gathers more momentum, it remains to be seen whether working with amateur films and home movies will unsettle the dominant conceptual models of national cinema or remain comfortably nestled within them.

Notes

1 The U.S.-based Center for Home Movies, International Home Movie Day spearheaded by the Association of Moving Image Archivists' small-gauge interest group, conferences such as *Saving Private Reels: Presentation, Appropriation and Re-contextualisation of the Amateur Moving Image*, held at University College Cork in 2010 (from which the current volume draws most of its essays), and an increasing number of dissertations, books, and articles on the subject, attest to the impetus to study and save amateur moving images.

2 Funded by the Irish Research Council and based at University College Cork, 2009–11.

3 In view of the significant differences between English–Canadian cinema traditions and those in Quebec, I am limiting myself to a discussion of English–Canadian cinema.

4 The National Film Board of Canada is in operation to the present day.

5 For a complete listing of ACL Top-Ten films from 1939–94 see Kattelle (2003).

6 Thatcher's *Another Day* (1934) was listed in the ACL distribution catalogue and was screened extensively across the U.S. See Horak (1998b, 25–6).

7 Judy would become a filmmaker in her own right working on, amongst other projects, a popular educational series called *Ages and Stages* (1949–57).

3

The Photographic Hangover: Reconsidering the Aesthetics of the Postwar 8mm Home Movie

Maija Howe

The August 1946 issue of *Movie Makers*, a filmmaking magazine published by the American Amateur Cinema League, features an article titled "Snapshot vs. Movie Shot" (Bergmann 1946, 423). Prefaced with the subheading "What still cameramen, as new filmers, will find helpful," the article is addressed to photographers trying their hand at moviemaking for the first time. This article was one of a number of pieces published in the U.S. after the Second World War to address the subject of a crossover between amateur photography and amateur film. In fact, amateur filmmaking guidebooks and magazines of the time regularly touched upon the notion of a cross-media migration, at times dedicating whole articles, chapters, and even books to the issue.[1]

That filmmaking literature addressed this issue with such regularity is perhaps telling of the radical expansion the field of amateur film was undergoing in the U.S. at the time. 8mm film stock was reintroduced onto the U.S. market in 1946, following a period of film scarcity due to U.S. involvement in the Second World War. In the years that followed, camera manufacturers released a flood of 8mm filmmaking equipment with the explicit intention of capturing a larger consumer market. This equipment was not only cheaper than prewar film equipment, it was also simpler to operate and more user friendly. Against the backdrop of a society newly geared towards family and leisure, and an exploding commodity culture buoyed by an optimistic postwar

economy, the market for 8mm film equipment boomed. As a result, amateur filmmaking and, more specifically, home moviemaking was transformed from a relatively niche-market hobby to a mass cultural phenomenon.[2]

This period from 1946 to 1965, when the Super 8 format was introduced, is often described as the era in which moviemaking was truly democratized. Cost and skill no longer impeded participation or, to borrow a phrase from Patricia Zimmermann (1995), no longer formed "a barrier to entry" (22). Millions of people across the U.S. with absolutely no prior experience with motion picture cameras embraced the hobby of moviemaking. Although these "cine-beginners" may have been newcomers to film, market surveys indicated that the majority of new filmmakers had "graduated" from snapshot photography. It was an assumption that amateur advisory literature of the time certainly shared. Writing in 1957 in *The Simple Art of Making Films*, Tony Rose remarks: "the fact is that the movie bug nearly always bites those who have already been well and truly bitten by the photographic bug" (41).

Much of the writing regarding this transition from photography to film centered on the relationship between these respective media and practices. It seems that publications were eager to ensure that crossover filmmakers clearly understood the nature of film's relationship to photography and, perhaps more importantly, that they recognized the important distinctions between the two. Although publications acknowledged certain parallels between photographic and filmmaking technologies and procedures, it was the distinctions rather than the similarities to which advisory literature overwhelmingly sought to attune new filmmakers. The first chapter of Kodak's (1958) *How to Make Good Home Movies* neatly illustrates the differential logic that typically framed discussions regarding the relationship between photography and film. Titled "Movies are Different from Still Pictures," the chapter argues that film and photographic media are characterized by fundamentally different, indeed oppositional, properties and representational capacities. What this text articulates, and indeed what we find expressed more broadly in advisory literature of this time, is an argument for medium specificity.

As Noël Carroll (1996) explains in *Theorizing the Moving Image*, the concept of medium specificity is premised on the assumption that media possess unique properties. According to proponents of medium specificity, these distinctive qualities determine the range of expressive possibilities available to or within a given art form. Every art form, therefore, is believed to be predisposed to a particular field of representation and particular representational effects, namely, those subjects and formal qualities that best utilize the unique properties of the medium. Positing that medium specificity arguments invariably possess an injunctive component, Carroll writes: "positively, [it] encourages pursuit of whatever differentiates media while negatively it directs media not to duplicate each other's effects" (14).

While the concept of medium specificity has occupied discourses on film since the late nineteenth century, as Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (2008, 2–3) observe, this idea has historically attracted renewed attention at transitional moments in which traditional distinctions between photography and film have been called into question. Arguably, medium specificity emerges as such a central concern in advisory literature of the postwar era precisely because it was feared that the lines between photography and film were increasingly blurring as a population of snapshooters was taking to moviemaking. As we shall see in this chapter, publications expressed considerable concern about amateur filmmakers' abilities to identify techniques and formal effects appropriate to film. According to publications, amateurs or, more specifically, home moviemakers seemed to be carrying techniques and principles learnt in snapshot photography into their filmmaking practice. Literature suggested that home movies of the time appeared to demonstrate what Rose (1957) refers to as a "hangover from still photography" (52).

It is such a proposition—that postwar amateur films show evidence of a "photographic hangover"—that this chapter addresses. Through a close reading of amateur filmmaking magazines and guidebooks, I want to examine the two principal ways in which a photographic hangover was seen to manifest itself in home movies of the postwar era. In their discussion of postwar advisory literature, Zimmermann (1995, 121–9) and Devin Orgeron (2006, 80) observe that amateurs were almost invariably urged to replicate the visual and narrative conventions of the Hollywood studio system. While this classical discourse on film aesthetics dominates amateur advisory literature, a second, competing discourse also emerges within these publications. As well as offering an account of what home moviemakers *should* do, this literature presents an account of what postwar home movies makers *were* doing.

As anyone who is familiar with home movies of this period can attest, these films depart considerably from the classical model of cinema advocated within advisory literature. Orgeron (2006, 80) points out that while this discrepancy is frequently acknowledged, in an academic context little attempt has been made to map the forms that instead emerged within this field. By examining the intermedial discourse that surfaces in postwar amateur filmmaking literature, I want to begin to chart some of the aesthetic tendencies of home movies produced in the U.S. at this time. Arguing that a photographic paradigm offers us a particularly profitable conceptual framework for engaging with the formal systems found in these films, this chapter will, in closing, consider what this schema offers histories and theories of amateur film.

The heritage of the headrest

In June 1946 Kodak signaled its return to the amateur film market by recommencing publication of its monthly periodical *Ciné-Kodak News*. Dubbed the "Introductory Issue," though perhaps more accurately described as the re-introductory issue, it marked the end of an almost four-year publishing hiatus brought about by America's heightened involvement in the Second World War. According to the editorial, the issue was intended as a primer, outlining the "fundamentals of good movies," summarizing moviemaking principles and techniques, and pointing out practices and habits to avoid (Editors of Eastman Kodak 1946b, 3). One of the articles, titled "The Hang of the Thing," outlines four key points to abide by while shooting. Next to directives against panoraming, short shot durations, and parallax "scalping," the authors instruct amateurs to steer clear of posed subjects (Editors of Eastman Kodak 1946c, 11). Instead, the article urges readers to ensure that family and friends are occupied with an activity of some description before commencing filming. The authors suggest, for example, that amateurs capture "Uncle Dick, absorbed in the ritual of loading and lighting his ever-present pipe," or "Friend George, swiping at practice golf balls on the side lawn" (11). Whether it was an activity that the individual was already involved in, or one manufactured by the filmmaker for the purpose of the shoot, amateurs were advised to avoid filming subjects who simply stood in front of the camera smiling or staring into the lens. According to the authors, subjects engaged in an activity of any kind were far more "natural" and "interesting" on film than stiffly posed subjects.

These calls for representations of subjects in motion speak of the ideologies and cultural values of the postwar era. Zimmermann (1995, 123) for instance, notes that the kinds of representations encouraged by advisory literature reflect the ideology of leisure that emerged in the U.S. at this time. We might also see these calls for action as reflective of a broader cultural-industrial emphasis on mobility. What interests me more centrally here, however, is what the advice in amateur publications reveals about the interpenetration of photographic and filmmaking technologies and practices at this particular moment.

In their discussion of still posing, the authors of the *Ciné-Kodak News* article refer to this practice of "lining up your subjects in a 'hold-it-and-smile' pose," as "a throwback to the headrest era" (ibid.). While perhaps an unfamiliar term for contemporary readers, the "headrest" referred to here was a device employed by portrait photographers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The slower lenses and less sensitive photographic emulsions in use at this time meant that exposure times were far longer, lasting anything from

FIGURE 3.1 *"The Heritage of the Headrest,"* Ciné-Kodak News, *1934*.

a matter of seconds to a matter of minutes, depending on the technology employed. It was vital that subjects remain motionless for the duration of the exposure, as any movement articulated during this time was likely to blur the image. The headrest, or "immobilizer," as it was colloquially referred to at the time, was one of the key mechanisms employed by studio photographers to attain this stasis. It consisted of a small bracket mounted on top of a stand, which was adjusted to cup the back of the sitter's head. As a photographic catalogue of 1856 explains, the purpose of the device was to enable "the sitter to keep the head in one position without fatigue" (Horne et al.).

An earlier issue of *Ciné-Kodak News* presents a more detailed account of the relationship between this early photographic technology and the kind of posing commonly found in home movies. Tellingly titled "The Heritage of the Headrest" (Editors of Eastman Kodak 1934), the article was accompanied by an image of a man posing for a photograph with a headrest partially visible behind him. Drawing the reader's attention to this image, the *Ciné-Kodak* authors write "above, you are given a privileged glimpse of the correct method of facing a camera as it was practiced at the turn of the century. Note the gentleman's fixed and terrified expression"(8).

Making explicit a point left implicit in the 1946 *Ciné-Kodak* article, the authors emphasize the outmoded nature of this photographic technique. Although this method of portraiture may have been appropriate to "the picture taker of yesterday," it was no longer considered appropriate in what was, at the time of writing, the contemporary photographic climate (8). Advancements in photographic technologies had since enabled split-second and, in turn, motion-picture photography, thus liberating the photographic subject from this obligatory stasis. What these articles suggest is that home movie practices of the time seemingly failed to register or reflect these changes in the apparatus. Instead, photographers and photographic subjects accustomed to the "hold-it" technique of early photography simply continued to employ this convention in their motion-picture practice. "Although the days of the elbow bracer, headrest, and slow lenses and film have gone never to return," the *Ciné-Kodak* authors remark, "their heritage lingers on" (8).

The characterization of static posing as a photographic legacy was restated elsewhere in advisory publications. In *Home Movies Made Easy*, for example, Bob Knight (1959) cautions amateurs against posing, reminding them that the rules and principles of snapshot photography no longer apply in film. "There's no 'Hold it a moment!' in moviemaking" (10).

> You've got the essence of the thing as soon as you realize that you're using a movie camera and not a snapshot camera. For in snapshots, with an average camera, you frequently have to pose your pictures—assuming that you're making pictures of people, which you usually are. You arrest their attention, their action, so they won't move and "spoil" the picture. … This you don't want in movies! (47)

Whether prompted by the cameraman or initiated by the subject, this kind of posing was attributed to a confusion of photographic and cinematic conventions. Rose (1957) elaborates on this notion of still posing as a vestige of snapshot practice in *The Simple Art of Making Films*. Describing a hypothetical scenario in which the amateur filmmaker asks "some casual passer-by" to appear in their shot, Rose writes:

> the chances are … that his first instinct will be to stand as still as a rock while you are shooting. Even when you explain that this is cine and that movement of the limbs is permissible, he will show an odd reluctance to stir himself. Not really so odd because he has probably posed for snapshots all his life and the very sight of a camera puts him in mind of the instruction: 'Quite still, please!' To ignore it now seems all wrong. (41)

For writers such as Rose the adoption of this kind of still posing was particularly problematic because it flouted key tenets of the classical model of cinema advocated in advisory literature. First, the frontality of the pose broke with the indirect mode of spectatorial address recommended in filmmaking, undermining the transparency and closure so crucial to the classical film model. Second, this form of posing, which lacked a clear narrative imperative, seemed particularly resistant to narrativization. Within advisory literature, however, opposition to the still pose was most strongly articulated in terms of an argument for medium specificity.

While amateur filmmaking publications recognized that film and photography differed from one another in a number of ways, these differences were frequently distilled to a single, simple distinction between stasis and motion. For advisory literature, what primarily distinguished film from photography was its ability to record and reproduce movement: while the still camera produced a static image that effectively "froze" motion, movies were able to capture "unfrozen and continuous" movement (Editors of Eastman Kodak 1958, 7). Because this ability to re-present motion was considered the exclusive province of film, movement was cast as a defining feature of the film medium and, accordingly, a compulsory element of motion picture representation. Typical of medium specificity arguments, authors maintained that movies must capitalize on this unique ability of the film medium, frequently reiterating truisms such as "*there must be movement in your pictures*" (Latour and Pennebaker 1960, 8; emphasis in original).

Given this emphasis on motion, it is hardly surprising that amateur advisory literature objected to the practice of posing in home movies. The stasis embodied by, and represented in, still movie portraits was considered anathemic to the representational schema of the moving image. What was considered so problematic about the amateur's "hold-it" technique was that it seemed counterintuitive to film; it appeared to work against the grain of a medium and art form whose apparent calling was to represent movement. Even more problematically, the stasis affected by this technique was deemed the aesthetic province of the photographic medium. Advisory literature maintained that photography was uniquely predisposed to the representation of static subjects, and encouraged amateurs to leave still posing, and static subject matter, more generally, to their snapshot cameras. "For this type of static picture, a box still camera will do a much better job," an article in an issue of *Bolex Reporter* observes (Lawson 1960, 25). Evidently, posed shots not only contravened the dictate that art forms should pursue qualities and effects preordained by the "nature" of their medium; they also breached the precept that, in Carroll's (1996) words, "there should be no imitation of effects between media"(8).

While the still pose may offer the most self-evident demonstration of a photographic hangover, advisory books and magazines interpreted other aspects of postwar home-movie practice as vestiges of photographic techniques. Most significantly, perhaps, we find the idea of a photographic hangover surfacing in discussions of one of the most remarked upon aspects of home movies: their disjunctive or discontinuous nature.

Discontinuity or the "single shot" technique

As Zimmermann (1995) and Orgeron (2006) have noted in their analyses of postwar amateur film, by the 1950s continuity had emerged as one of the primary concerns of amateur advisory literature (126–7; 77–81). Writing in 1946, the authors of a *Ciné-Kodak News* article declared continuity "the most important item in the successful movie recipe" (Editors of Eastman Kodak 1946a, 19). Knight (1959) was equally enthusiastic 13 years later, opening his chapter on continuity with the statement: "In movies—continuity is *everything*" (47; emphasis in original). The significance conferred upon continuity in advisory publications was not unrelated to this literature's championing of Hollywood style. According to the explanations of authors, however, the need for continuity ultimately stemmed from the unique characteristics of the film medium. Publications explained that the successive nature of motion picture shots—the fact that shots followed one another sequentially on a filmstrip and, as a result, consecutively onscreen—suggested that a relationship existed between these temporally connected images. "There's an implied promise," Knight notes, "that each succeeding scene will have some connection with those which preceded it" (47). This ability to infer connections, create meaning, and construct narrative through the arrangement of images in time was cast as a unique faculty of motion pictures. Reiterating the injunctive imperative of medium specificity arguments, advisory literature asserted that it was, therefore, a faculty amateurs must be sure to utilize.

Despite this emphasis on continuity, advisory publications complained that home movies routinely comprised a "hodgepodge" collection of shots that bore little or no apparent relationship to one another. According to this literature, films were liable to jump from one subject to the next with each succeeding shot: "Perhaps the filmer will photograph his wife coming out of the house; his children playing in the park; a beautiful view from the hilltop he happened to be driving over; then perhaps the children skating in the street, and so on" (Allen 1946, 738). As well as inhibiting narrative continuity, this "one-subject-one-shot" approach was seen to compromise graphic and spatio-temporal continuity. Characterized as piecemeal, disjointed and

haphazard, home movies were seen to consist of what an article in *Parents' Magazine* disparagingly referred to as "slipshod, totally unrelated potshots" (Pinney 1956, 113). Publications attributed this disjunctive tendency to what was described by one publication as a "one subject, one shot" technique (Editors of Eastman Kodak 1960, 52). Rather than fleshing out a subject over the course of a series of complementary and interrelated shots, it was suggested that amateurs were inclined to adopt an arbitrary approach to filming, only shooting subjects as impulse dictated. Little attempt was made to structure sequences in advance or, alternatively, to edit shots into graphically consistent or smoothly flowing sequences after filming. According to advisory publications, amateurs simply didn't think through how each shot would connect with the shots surrounding it and, relatedly, how it could be integrated into a unified, consistent structure. The problem was that home moviemakers typically failed to "think in sequences" (Dabbs 1962, 12); instead, they remained myopically preoccupied with the individual shot.

Interestingly, according to a number of advisory publications, this "potshot" approach was directly derived from snapshot technique. As *The ACL Movie Book: A Guide to Making Better Movies* suggests, the arbitrary shooting of a multiplicity of miscellaneous subjects typified "the method of exposing film in a snapshot camera" (77). Elaborating this point, an article in *Movie Makers* complains: "far too many amateurs have the habit of using their movie cameras like Box Brownies. They take a series of snapshots that no cutting room magic could possibly conjure into a coherent movie" (Roberts 1954, 44). The suggestion that the disjunctive aesthetic of home movies was attributable to a photographic hangover was once again reiterated by Rose (1957) in *The Simple Art of Making Films.* Noting that amateurs often failed to prioritize the relationship between shots, Rose remarks that, like snapshooters, "many amateur cineastes continue to think in terms of the single shot" (51).

Like static film portraiture, this "one subject, one shot" technique was seen to be grounded in the photographic medium. Publications maintained that autonomy and self-sufficiency were inherent and defining features of photographs: while it was imperative that motion picture shots demonstrate consistency and unity from shot to shot, photographs weren't beholden to this dictate. Emphasizing this point in *Home Movies Made Easy*, Knight (1959) writes, "if you thumbed through a succession of snaps, they could all be of different subjects … Each, in other words, could stand on its own feet" (27). *The ACL Movie Book* (1949) elaborates: "each still photograph is a unit in itself, and it may be viewed, entirely disassociated from other shots that you exposed on the same roll of film" (7). Unlike the movie shot, which was only a "contributory fragment" and "should never be a complete statement in itself" (Rose 1957, 50), the photograph was considered a self-contained totality. Once again, for advisory literature,

the problem posed by the single-shot technique was that it was seen to mark home movies with a photographic, rather than properly "cinematic" aesthetic.

The suggestion that the discontinuous nature of the home movie was connected to a photographic usage of the camera would once again seem to tally with our understanding of the imperatives underwriting home-movie production. The objectives of home moviemakers would appear to be far more aligned with snapshot photographers than narrative filmmakers. Certainly, advertising discourses were inclined to view 8mm moviemaking and snapshot photography as twin pursuits structured around a single preservative impulse. Orgeron (2006) elaborates on this correspondence between the "projects" of home moviemaking and snapshot photography in "Mobile Home Movies." Drawing on Susan Sontag's framing of the photographer-as-collector in *On Photography* (1977), Orgeron notes the relevance of this assessment to amateur filmmaking. The amateur filmmaker might also be understood as a "moment collector," he argues; a figure "driven by the same impulse to 'collect the world'" (77).

Recuperating the hangover

That amateur filmmaking publications considered home movies to be marred with a photographic sensibility is reflected in the terminology popularly employed in this literature. Authors of the time routinely referred to home movies using terms such as "animated snapshots" and "snapshots in motion" (Salkin 1958, 18; Amateur Cinema League 1949, 7). For advisory literature this photographic aesthetic was not simply the result of employing "photographic" techniques, but at a far more fundamental level, thinking about and approaching moviemaking "photographically." In Gaskill and Englander's (1947) words, these amateurs were haunted by "the ghost of still-picture psychology" (147).

Recent work in intermedia studies has demonstrated that stepping away from an essentialist position to consider how moving image forms and practices intersect with the forms and practices of other media can offer us new perspectives on our objects. Given the extensive interplay between amateur film and photography in the postwar period, this would appear to be one case in which an intermedia approach would prove particularly profitable. As well as opening up new ways of thinking about home movies, I am interested in how an intermedia approach might furnish us with new concepts and vocabularies for engaging with these films. What might it mean to think home movies through the frame of photography, and what might this reconceptualization bring to the field of amateur film studies?

Significant research has already charted various ways in which amateur film and photography intersect. In his contribution to this anthology, for example, Roger Odin considers the imbrication of these fields of practice, exploring the shared social spaces in which home movies and amateur photos are produced and received. Richard Chalfen (1987) has also examined the values and social functions attributed to and performed by these visual forms. Exploring patterns of behavior shared by amateur filmmakers and snapshooters, Chalfen has suggested that home movies and snapshots might be understood as two examples of a single form of interpersonal communication. In her examination of the domestication of visual cultures, Stacey Johnson (1998a, 1998b) has further considered the ideological marriage of these two forms within industrial discourses. Each of these inquiries has excavated different aspects of amateur film's relationship to photography; I am interested in extending this line of research to consider how the aesthetics of home movies might be understood in relation to this intermediality.

Although there has been an increased interest in amateur film aesthetics in recent years, to date there is still relatively little published work that attempts to theorize the formal characteristics of home movies. As a field, we have yet to develop a comprehensive body of vocabularies and frameworks with which we can engage, and attempt to understand, the aesthetic tendencies that emerge within these films. In this chapter I have tracked the two principal ways in which advisory literature considered a photographic hangover to manifest in postwar home movies. I am ultimately interested, however, in how this concept might be applied more broadly to think through a wider range of representational principles and formal effects that seem to recur within these films. How, for example, might the presentational mode favored within home movies and their privileging of referentiality over narrativity be theorized in relation to a photographic mode of representation? How can photographic structurings of space help us think through the autarchic nature of home movie shots? Orgeron (2006, 77) has suggested that, like the amateur photographer, the figure of the home moviemaker might be understood as a "moment collector." Building on this assertion, what might an attentiveness to this "photographic" impulse bring to our thinking about the staccato temporality of home movies?

In "Theorizing Amateur Cinema: Limitations and Possibilities," Ryan Shand (2008, 38) calls for the formulation of new frameworks for addressing amateur films that are both historically and theoretically grounded. The idea of the photographic hangover proposed by amateur advisory literature would seem to offer us one such paradigm. I would argue that, in its marriage of formal and historical considerations, this photographic framework provides us with a particularly profitable conceptual apparatus for understanding and

theorizing the aesthetics of home movies produced in the U.S. in the postwar period.

Notes

1 See, for example, Editors of Eastman Kodak (1958, 6–10); Rose (1957, 32–42); Hughes (1960, 60–70). At least two book-length publications also specifically addressed this crossover. See Freytag (1964) and Gilmour (1963).

2 For comprehensive accounts of the growth of the amateur film market at this time, see Kattelle (2000) and Zimmermann (1995).

4

Amateur Film, Automobility and the Cinematic Aesthetics of Leisure

Mark Neumann

Dr. Gail Jackson tied the luggage to the roof of their Hudson and took his wife, Mabel, and their sons Phil and Fred, west on a holiday in the summer of 1947. He also packed his oval-shaped Keystone K-8 8mm movie camera with a key for its spring-loaded motor. The Jacksons left their farm in Vincennes, Indiana, and drove 150 miles to St. Louis and picked up Route 66, the main route west. If Dr. Jackson's films offer an index of what mattered along the way, nothing was worth filming for the first 450 miles. The film begins at the Little King's Hotel Court in Joplin, Missouri. Dr. Jackson filmed the motor court's sign advertising "hot water heat." Then, he stood in front of the Little King's and swirled to make a sweeping panorama of its white, elongated ranch-style buildings. The Hudson is parked in front of their room as he records the motor court from several more angles. He doesn't pick up the camera again until the next day when the family finds itself in the middle of the flat and expansive Oklahoma plains somewhere along Route 66.

Dr. Jackson's films are now archival holdings offering a historical look at the two-lane Route 66 before it became soaked in the warm, yellowed sentimentality of Americana.[1] At the time of their journey, Route 66 had already been featured in John Steinbeck's 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath* and John Ford had directed a well-received film of the novel a year later. Steinbeck called it "The Mother Road," a name that eventually became embedded in the late twentieth-century nostalgic revival of interest in the highway. In 1946, Nat King Cole's hit song "(Get Your Kicks On) Route 66" celebrated the road. Yet, the Jackson films suggest Route 66 was nothing more than another highway

to carry them west on a family holiday. In many ways, it appears no different from Highway 89 that they drove from Flagstaff, Arizona to Salt Lake City, or Highway 40, which they took from Salt Lake City to Colorado's Rocky Mountains.

Considering that Gail Jackson, Mabel Jackson and Phil Jackson have passed away, there is little explanation from the family for these films. Fred Jackson was six years old in 1947. When I interviewed Fred, he said the family's trips are "mostly just vague snippets in my mind now." His memories resemble the choppy discontinuities of his father's films but don't register anything specific about the images. "My brother Phil got to sleep on the car seat and I had a platform on the floor. My dad tried to make an air cooler by putting a block of ice in front of the heater vent to cool the air."

How do we read, understand and interpret amateur films when there is an absence, or poverty, of contextual information? In the case of the Jackson collection, multiple viewings of the films, identifying various landmarks, examining period road maps and other historical information allowed me to piece together a partial understanding of their journey. Nevertheless, the films lend themselves to an interpretation that illuminates the use of amateur film in a particular historical and cultural milieu. Compared to our current era of seemingly endless moving images made by everything from digital cameras to cell phones, these reels display an aesthetic of economy. In part, they offer an immediate and direct witness to one family's record of leisure that reveals how the camera and mobility become intertwined in the context of the journey.

This chapter focuses on the interpretive modes of mobilized perception found in these films. Specifically, it considers the practical, economic and cultural factors at work in the production of these moving images. In 47 minutes, the three reels of the Jackson films record a montage of places, ways of seeing places and others, in a manner that captures the conflation of amateur film and mobility. The economic conditions of production offer partial criteria for understanding what is documented in these reels. At the same time, the camera exposes how leisure travel conjures a distanced vision towards the strange and the familiar. To some extent, the tourist camera shares qualities of anthropological and ethnographic observation. When that same camera is turned on the family, it records the time and space of the family as a performative narrative that blurs the boundaries between actuality and fantasy. Finally, these films offer an indirect witness to a modern mode of perception that conflates the technologies of automobile travel with amateur film. Taken together, the camera is central in both documenting and facilitating the production of leisure time and space. Considering the economic, technological, and cultural aspects of these films allows us to contemplate

the moving-image evidence in an informed, though speculative, manner, particularly in the absence of other contextual information.

Considering practical conditions of production

The in-camera editing of the Jackson films juxtaposes scenes assembled in a linear order paralleling the chronological order of events experienced on the journey. The camera gets picked up along the way, film is exposed, and the result is a montage that dramatically compresses time and distance. Apart from connecting separate 50 feet rolls of 8mm film onto three larger reels in sequential order, there is minimal editing. Dr. Jackson probably edited out poorly exposed film because the running time for each reel suggests that some footage was extracted. The first reel runs to approximately 14 minutes, covering the trip from Joplin, Missouri to Walnut Canyon National Monument, Arizona. The second reel runs to approximately 14 minutes, covering the journey from Walnut Canyon to Bryce Canyon, Utah. The third reel runs to nearly 19 minutes, beginning somewhere along Highway 89 in Utah to Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Here is a general log of the time spent filming along Route 66, comprising the first reel, which offers a glimpse of 1,118 miles documented in 14 minutes of film footage:

29 seconds in Joplin at the Little King's Hotel;
1 minute, 28 seconds from Joplin to Oklahoma City;
34 seconds of Oklahoma City;
5 minutes, 17 seconds from Oklahoma City to Albuquerque, New Mexico, comprised of the following:

–2 minutes, 10 seconds of passing scenes through western Oklahoma, mostly shot through windows of their moving car
–10 seconds of the boys dressed like cowboys
–1 minute, 28 seconds of passing scenery in the Texas panhandle
–50 seconds at a roadside information building on the Texas and New Mexico border
–39 seconds of passing scenery in New Mexico

1 minute, 26 seconds of the University of New Mexico campus in Albuquerque;
9 seconds driving through the city of Albuquerque;
54 seconds of landscape between Albuquerque and Laguna, New Mexico;
28 seconds driving from Laguna to Grants, New Mexico; the boys climb on lava beds;

> 22 seconds of landscape between Grants and Gallup, New Mexico;
> 34 seconds in Gallup viewing Native Americans;
> 1 minute, 24 seconds from Gallup to Walnut Canyon National Monument, Arizona;
> 1 minute of scenes at Walnut Canyon.

After filming views of Walnut Canyon's visitor center, ancient native ruins and the family, the film ran out. Dr. Jackson reloaded and shot another minute of the canyon, which he placed at the start of the second compilation reel. At Flagstaff, they left Route 66, headed north on Highway 89 to the Grand Canyon, and then to Utah and Colorado, which appears on the second and third reels.

This rudimentary breakdown of filming times, location and distance on this first reel helps reveal the economy of shooting 8mm film. Dr. Jackson did not entirely abide by the directions given in the Keystone K-8 instruction manual (c.1939), which offers the following advice in the section titled "Proper Length of Scene":

> There is a natural tendency among amateur photographers to cramp or shorten scenes, thus detracting considerably from the interest of their pictures. It is good practice to make every picture long enough so that it will take at least ten seconds to show. Many exposures will require more than that, but make this your minimum exposure. Then each of your scenes will be free from "choppiness" and your pictures will have a sustained interest and charm. (16)

Initially, Dr. Jackson shot moving images as if making still photographs. Many are less than five seconds and result in the visual "choppiness" that the manual warns against. This technique may not stem from a "natural tendency" to shoot short scenes, but from the costs of shooting 8mm film. According to film and photography magazine advertisements from the period, in 1947 shooting and processing 50 feet of standard 8mm, yielding three to four minutes of moving images, cost approximately $4.00 (U.S. currency). By 2012 standards, the equivalent cost, calculating a 937.3 percent inflation rate, would be approximately $41.50, or between $10 and $14 per minute. These rough equivalencies of film prices offer partial criteria for the practicality of documenting the family holiday. Noting these parameters helps imagine criteria for filming from a practical standpoint, and why particular scenes might register attention.

The meaning and cultural value of the family holiday as a mode of leisure is another, albeit less calculated and quantifiable, dimension for considering what events become a scene. In the ambiguous cultural time-space of *the*

holiday, vacating home for the leisure time-space of travel offers an "inverse-image" (Lefebvre 1979, 138) of contrasts toward everyday routine. In the flight from everyday life, "a 'world of leisure' tends to develop, a world which is purely artificial, ideal, and outside of daily life," says Lefebvre, but it is a world that could not "be created without constant reference to everyday life and the changing contrasts implied by it" (137). The moving images convey life along the road but they also register a sense of discovery, and possess a strangeness and point of comparison to the life left in Vincennes. It is as if the camera was an emblem of awakening, of paying attention to a world of notable differences worth recording.

Anthropological/tourist vision and performativity

The Jackson family moved through a New Mexico and Arizona glowing in a popular mythology of the American West and noble Native Americans that were largely the fantasies of novels, movies, and advertising. From the end of the nineteenth century onward, the American West reappeared in performances such as Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, Owen Wister novels, John Ford films, as well as popular pulp fiction and comic books. The Southwest was what D. H. Lawrence, in 1924, called "the great playground of the white American" (quoted in Sagar 1982, 64). Lawrence wrote about the culture of New Mexico and the Southwest as a strange and confusing theater. "All the wildness and woolliness and westernity and motor cars and art and sage and savages are so mixed up, so incongruous, that it is a farce and everybody knows it," wrote Lawrence (quoted in Sagar 1982, 2). This theater was found in architecture and roadside souvenir stands that allowed tourists supposedly to see how "real Indians" lived. At the Grand Canyon, for example, the architecture of Mary Colter, funded by the Fred Harvey Company and the Santa Fe Railway, brought the fantasies of a "wild" West to new proportion with the construction of Hopi House in 1905 and the Desert Watchtower in 1932, manufacturing a vast and a dreamy tourist world of Native American life (Neumann 1999, 35–50). The romantic and nostalgic tourist Southwest displayed an imaginary landscape where cowboys and natives depicted in Hollywood westerns still roamed. "Easterners … despite their enthusiasm for progress in general, did not want the West to change," notes Michael Kammen (1991), and "hoped that somehow it could remain an 'oversized museum' for nature lovers and historically minded individuals" (400).

Tourists bearing cameras came to the Southwest looking for the native life that had historically been under study and observation by anthropologists, ethnographers, and photographers. In the temporal-spatial realm of the holiday, the "camera is a kind of passport that annihilates moral boundaries

and social inhibitions, freeing the photographer from any responsibility toward the people photographed," noted Susan Sontag (1973), and the "photographer is supertourist, an extension of the anthropologist, visiting natives and bringing back news of their exotic doings and strange gear" (42).

In Gallup, New Mexico, Dr. Jackson seems determined to gather images of Native Americans. Gallup is a small city that provides a range of services for people living on the border of the Navajo reservation. On Gallup's city streets, however, he seems a reluctant cinematographer. He films two Navajo women walking down the sidewalk; one carries a baby. For them, his camera angle suggests that he could be filming almost anything on the street. In fact, when the woman carrying the child finally looks directly at the camera, she looks over her shoulder, unsure if he is filming her or something behind her. This scene is followed by several short clips, shot from a considerable distance, of various Native Americans who walk past store fronts, wait at busy intersections, walk with rolled up blankets, wear moccasins and native jewelry, walk down the sidewalk with a loaf of bread, or pause to look in a department store window. Dr. Jackson aims his camera at his subjects from across the street or through a parked car window. These scenes resemble surveillance footage. These brief shots of different subjects suggest that Dr. Jackson simultaneously wanted to look at (and film) the Native Americans but recognized the potential impropriety of aiming his camera at strangers.

FIGURE 4.1 *Filming "the other" from a distance. Screenshot.*

This reluctance evaporates, however, 20 miles later, on the border of Arizona. The family pulls over to see a native hogan, a traditional hut, with Navajo women and children dressed in decorative beaded velvet blouses, skirts, and turquoise jewelry. At this tourist place inviting them to look, photograph and buy souvenirs, Dr. Jackson seems more at ease in filming this scene. He shoots a Navajo child eating ice cream, while the mother helps manage the child's pose. Next, a shot of a traditional hogan made of stacked logs and mud. The third scene shows a young woman spinning carded wool onto a spindle for weaving, but the camera slowly pans to the left, fixing on a heavy Navajo woman sleeping on the ground next to her.

These episodes in Gallup and at the roadside stand offer alternate modes of filming the "exotic" subjects. The scenes at the roadside stand mimic the conventions of the ethnographic film, showing closeups of natives in customary dress and jewelry, the traditional round dwelling made of mud and wood, and the work of turning wool into a usable commodity. In this instance, the tourist and the anthropologist could be looking through the same lens. But all of this takes place in the contrived setting of a tourist attraction, where the native subjects are complicit in the performance for the camera. By comparison, the scenes from Gallup are actually much closer to providing a contemporary ethnographic representation of indigenous people who go to the city to do their business, go to the bank, cross busy streets, and look in store windows. However, these scenes are made from a surreptitious distance that suggests a social discomfort in making them.

These scenes depicting Native Americans point toward stereotypical representations, but they also illuminate two impulses of the tourist gaze. It is a gaze toward the past that looks for evidence of tradition: the tourist shares some of the same motives as the anthropologist by creating images that testify to cultural difference. These images beckon toward a different historical moment, a world that doesn't exist except as historical stereotypes and a desire for witnessing traditional ways that have remained unchanged. At the same time, the camera registers a modern gaze; a mobilized view of a fragmented and disunified world. "For moderns, reality and authenticity are thought to be elsewhere: in other historical periods and other cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles," writes Dean MacCannell (1972, 3). "Sightseeing is a ritual performed to the differentiations of society … a kind of collective striving for a transcendence of the modern totality, a way of attempting to overcome the discontinuity of modernity, of incorporating its fragments into unified experience" (13).

At sanctioned tourist sites like the Native American roadside stand in New Mexico and, later, at Grand Canyon's Hopi House, Dr. Jackson has little trouble recording contemporary Native Americans who appear as if they stepped out of history. This mode of looking at them and filming them is well

established in the Southwest. For instance, a 1909 brochure for Hopi House invited tourists to enter the building designed to put natives on display. "Go inside and you see how these gentle folk live," reads the brochure. "Hopis are making 'piki,' twining the raven black hair of the 'manas' in big side whorls, smoking corn-cob pipes, building sacred altars, mending moccasins—doing a hundred un-American things" (Black 1909, n.p.). In 1929, a regional guidebook described the Southwest as a place "where the 'red' man still lives in his native state, primitive but happy, contented, unchanged by the white man's civilization" (Tillotson and Taylor 1929, 27). These invitations to the sightseer reflect a larger legacy of images and discourse that manufactured a conception of the unchanged native world comfortably embedded in the modern present. Dr. Jackson's films offer a small example of this larger vision, this capacity to look at "the other" and make films that offered evidence of a vastly different and exotic world away from home.

Dr. Jackson's camera may attempt to capture the "otherness" of Native Americans but it also had the capacity to render the familiar as strange. Amateur films "can give shape and form, give a sense of materiality, to dimensions of desires and relationships that might otherwise only dwell in the interiors of people's lives" (Neumann 2002, 33). In the time and space of leisure, when people are liberated from the conventions of home and routine, the journey calls out for them to express a different sense of self. The presence of the camera only helps to magnify the potential for a spontaneous sense of performance revealing the alterity of people engaging with new environs. As such, the holiday film serves as a site that reveals how mobility and the camera work in concert to create a performative fantasy narrative.

Somewhere in the Texas panhandle, along Route 66, Dr. Jackson films a ten-second scene of Fred and Phil. The boys dressed identically in white t-shirts and blue jeans stand in front of barbed-wire fence, a golden wheat field behind them. Both wear cowboy hats, western boots, and gun belts for their toy pistols. The older Phil stands with his arms across his chest, looking tough. Fred stands behind him with his hand on his holstered pistol, staring at the camera. Suddenly, they reach for their guns, drop to one knee and point the guns directly at the camera as if they were gunslingers in a Hollywood western. They do another take of the scene. This time they face each other, draw their pistols as if in a duel, and shoot each other. Traveling through the American West, they carry the images seen in movies and comic books, as well as their cowboy gear, with them. This scene of two children playing cowboys is conjured only because their father has aimed his movie camera at them. The presence of the camera elicits a performance that reveals a small glimpse of the boys' fantasy life.

The appearance of family members in these films records their encounters with strange and unfamiliar worlds. In many ways, the tourist journey is a

FIGURE 4.2 *The Jackson boys as gunslingers. Screenshot.*

time and space of "liminal" experience where people are between ordered and routine social worlds. Passages through magical-religious places, for instance, often entail entry through symbolic and ceremonial thresholds or portals. "To cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world," wrote Arnold van Gennep ([1908] 1960, 19). Liminal zones of cultural performance separate people from daily life, notes Victor Turner (1988, 24–5), putting them in an unfamiliar "limbo" where images of society are magnified, re-formed, inverted, and recolored. The tourist road trip resembles some qualities of liminal experience as it throws people into new places, often loaded with existing cultural narratives. For instance, the family marks their passage through "thresholds" with brief shots; signs indicating that they are entering a new city, town, or state. Crossing into Arizona, Dr. Jackson frames the landscape through an arch hanging over the highway:

YOU NOW LEAVE NEW MEXICO
COME AGAIN

When the family is at the Texas border, the boys, dressed in cowboy gear, pose with a large stone sign shaped like the state. Near Cameron, Arizona, they make a shot of the boys sitting atop another large stone sign pointing the way to the Grand Canyon.

FIGURE 4.3 *Marking the threshold at Grand Canyon. Screenshot.*

Similar to photographs of people posing with markers and monuments, these moving images serve a narrative function in the context of the whole film. Amid the brief scenes, rapidly compressing location against location, they punctuate and frame the film and locate the family on their journey. Filming such scenes is a ritual where they perform a boundary crossing into a new landscape where new experiences await them. These rituals not only mark time and the distance traveled, they are also instances when the family imposes its presence on an otherwise anonymous public space. They make a personal claim on a road and geography that anyone can travel.

The films, however, reveal another aspect of the journey as a performative fantasy narrative as they display performances of family. Mabel, Phil, and Fred appear as characters in a story that is both real and performative. Dr. Jackson composes images of them sitting together and looking at the view of Walnut Canyon. Mabel and Fred are filmed from behind, looking through a sighting tube at Grand Canyon. In southern Utah, Mabel picks up a fistful of sand and lets it pour through her fingers, displaying the foreign terrain through which they travel.

The longest sequence in all three reels shows the family riding horses together near the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. This sequence of multiple scenes runs for three and a half minutes. The boys wear their cowboy clothes

and pose with the horses in the corral. On the trail ride, Dr. Jackson films from the saddle since we can see the ears of his horse in a few frames. The family meanders behind the wrangler guide through the tall pines. Fred follows their guide down the trail from a cliff. There are multiple scenes of Mabel and Phil cantering across a flat stretch. Phil is riding fast enough for his hat to fly off his head, only to have the chinstrap prevent him from losing it altogether. Here, in this convergence of themes, the family appears as common unit engaged in common activity, and the boys' cowboy fantasy—an ongoing theme in the films—has reached its full expression.

In nearly every scene Dr. Jackson is conspicuously absent, present only as an observer watching through the camera. In one brief segment he has handed the camera to Phil to shoot him posing under a tree with his hand on Mabel's shoulder. Phil films them, but then takes another shot as they walk away from their pose. No one holds hands; Dr. Jackson carries his pith helmet. From the scenes of the boys posing with signs, to Mabel and her sons wandering in the parched desert, to the family transformed into galloping cowboys, the camera testifies to Dr. Jackson as a witness to a family he observes from behind the lens. For a man who, as Fred told me, was a busy physician often making house calls, these scenes convey a sense of unity and togetherness, of their mutual and common efforts to appear as a family, at least on film. In contrast to daily life, Donald Redfoot (1984) notes the holiday is "a time that can be devoted entirely to family and friendships as the core of what is most importantly real" (306). This is, perhaps, a hope of any family venturing away from home. The Jackson films record that ambition to create a cinematic portrait of the family at play together; but creating such performances largely relies on the absence of the filmmaker from these scenes. In these films, Dr. Jackson watches and directs the family from a distance, a vantage point where their performances lend themselves to realizing a real fiction of unity and togetherness.

The road as a site of panoramic-cinematic vision

At some point, after passing through Oklahoma City, perhaps while driving the seemingly endless hours across the stretch of unpopulated highway through Oklahoma and the Texas panhandle, it appears to have occurred to Dr. Jackson that being inside the moving car is the equivalent of watching a movie. The scenes passing across the car's windows offer an aesthetic experience of mobility that is panoramic and exhilarating.

It is as if the Hudson rolling smoothly along Route 66 is a movie camera framing the moving landscape outside the car. The windshield, dashboard,

FIGURE 4.4 *Filming through the windshield of the moving automobile. Screenshot.*

and the passenger windows frame and provide a barrier between the interior space of those inside who watch an exterior world rushing by. So, while he is driving, Dr. Jackson picks up the Keystone, aims it through the windshield and shoots the moving scene. The mobilized view of the uprooted passenger is both real and artificial, a dissolving of perception into a "machine ensemble" (Schivelbusch 1986, 16–32), a combination of auto, camera, and human. The film shot through the window of the moving car is a record of perception and sensation that arises out of a conflation of automobility and cinematography.

In the five minutes of film between Oklahoma City and Albuquerque, three minutes are devoted to running the camera at the land passing through the windows. The scenes cut from oceans of golden wheat, to distant farmhouses, to the car advancing down the road as filmed through the windshield. Dr. Jackson still stops to make stationary pans across landscapes when they leave their car to see a sight. But throughout the reels, filming through a moving vehicle becomes a dominant mode of recording their travels. These scenes of mobility suggest how the holiday film is not only a record of what is seen, but also an impulse to capture the experience of mobility.

Wolfgang Schivelbusch's (1986) concept of "panoramic vision" stems from nineteenth-century rail travel. Rail passengers found themselves contained in the "machine ensemble" of the train's cars while smooth rails and locomotive

power moved them at a higher speed than they had previously experienced. With locomotive speed, the foreground directly outside became blurred, allowing for the distant landscape to become aestheticized through the train window. Schivelbusch describes this experience as "panoramic perception" where the "traveler saw objects, landscapes, etc. *through* the apparatus which moved him through the world … machine and the motion it created became integrated into his vision" (63–4; emphasis in original).

The notion of panoramic vision equally describes the experience of automobile travel. In the 1930s, Benton MacKaye considered "the car as a personalized form of railroad" that "should be thought of not as a horseless carriage but as 'a family locomotive,' for which new types of highway, as distinctive as tracks, should be built," notes Phil Patton (1986, 69). Since the late 1920s, automobile design reflected an ongoing desire to achieve an experience of streamlined, aerodynamic flow. Car designs introduced in the 1940s aspired to mimic the designs of airplanes with body styles sporting tailfins, improved suspension, power steering, and automatic transmissions, as both automobile designers and drivers "wanted cars that floated on air, unattached to humble pavement" (Patton 1986, 136).

Automobiles manifested an industrialized perception consumed by velocity that collapsed spatial distances and insulated passengers from the direct sensation of crossing terrain. Highway designers considered the aesthetic interests of drivers and passengers as they planned roads with scenery in mind. Visitors at the 1939 General Motors' "Futurama" exhibit at the World's Fair in New York City sat in cars that floated over an America connected through a modern superhighway system characterized by speed, efficiency, and scenic beauty. Automobiles and highway design carried an inherent cinematic structure aimed towards mobilized vision. "The modernism of the superhighway was the modernism of the transported eye, of flowing sight as well as flowing space … lovely terrain filled the screen the highway projected … turning distant landmarks into actors on the wide windscreen," writes Patton (1986, 129).

The Jackson family did not travel on the superhighway of the future, but they made their journey in a historical moment when an ideology of progress and the promise of modern life circulated in excess in American culture. Their Hudson moving west on the highway offered a small moment when feeling such a promise could be grasped and captured on film. Watching their films, scene after scene shows their view: glimpses of the strange landscapes and people they encountered, as well as the experience of moving through environs that seemed projected onto the windows. If the moving automobile offered the space where such a view of the world could be witnessed, the Keystone camera allowed them to harness that view, sever it from the automobile, and project it on the screen at home.

Today, the Jackson films offer more than a moment of time travel, allowing us to witness fragmented views of a family's journey through 1947 America. They also document a historical moment of how mobilized vision manifested itself in cultural life. As Dr. Jackson framed leisure time and space through the amateur camera, he recorded images that showed how mobility and film worked hand in hand to capture and convey the aesthetic experience of leisure. At the same time, the films suggest how a modern ensemble of technologies had curiously captured the Jacksons, framing and fueling their journey through the car and the moving image camera.

Given the absence of contextual information for these films, I have embarked upon an effort in imaginative reconstruction with consideration of the historical moment surrounding the Jackson family's journey. The same riddles of context face many amateur films. In this case, locating surviving family members, retrieving period maps and images, consulting advertisements in magazines and newspapers, and generally looking for clues in the films regarding specific geographic locations and businesses were all done in an effort to provide some semblance of context. In addition, I attempted to learn as much as possible about the operation of the camera. Finally, I made an effort to consider the conditions of filming specific scenes (who was present or absent, how long a scene lasted, and the possible intentions of the filmmaker). All of these techniques help to assemble a possible, albeit speculative, plausible narrative that can aid in interpreting the relationship of the filmmaker to the scenes created with the camera and, in turn, the broader scenes experienced beyond the framing viewfinder.

Note

1 The Jackson Family Home Movies, which were deposited by Fred Jackson, are housed in the Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. My thanks to UGA archivist Margaret Compton for her assistance.

PART TWO

Private Reels, Historiographical Concerns

5

Cinemas of Catastrophe and Continuity: Mapping Out Twentieth-Century Amateur Practices of Intentional History-Making in Northern England[1]

Heather Norris Nicholson

Introduction

Mangled metal and burnt beams dominate the *Glengarry Local Newsreel* made in 1929 by two Lancashire amateur filmmakers, Harold and Sidney Preston, for screening in their home cinema at Bramham in Stockport, Greater Manchester. Three fires, two in an enormous cotton mill and one that devastated all but the front façade of a large cinema in the center of the coastal town of Southport, occurred within a four-month period that year. The cavernous interiors, gaping windows, and shots of masonry starkly silhouetted against the sky symbolize the catastrophic effects upon local lives and economies of these events. Traveling to record such occurrences for subsequent public consumption reveals the news-making imperative of some early enthusiasts and how cine equipment was used in distinctive ways to shape individual and shared memories of events at different scales.

The Preston brothers were not unique in filming spectacular occurrences and, by the late 1920s, some cine enthusiasts regularly made amateur

newsreels for local audiences. Their mix of sporting fixtures, public occurrences, and scenes of derailed trains, floods, fires, and other dramatic events may be understood as homespun imitations of contemporary professionally produced newsreel footage. They link to broader historical considerations of regional, local, and civic identity formation and current debates on cinema's value beyond entertainment. Their simple eyewitness reporting may be seen as antecedents to citizen journalism and contemporary nonfiction uses of new media and communication technologies. Nonprofessional attempts at news-making inform our understanding of changing amateur cinematic practices and media histories during the twentieth century. They also open a space for considering how deliberate actions of visual memory-making and issues of intentionality impart meaning to amateur footage in and beyond the archive.

As expanding disciplinary approaches and intellectual interests maintain the dynamism of amateur cinema studies, valuing amateur footage for its historical significance remains important. Despite concerns about the risk of restricting image interpretation to being evidential proof of specific past actions (Shand 2008, 36–60), a vigorous strand within archival-based research focuses on what filmmakers filmed as legitimate routes into understanding evolving amateur visual practice.

This chapter explores the historical impulses that underlie the amateur desire to capture private and public moments on cine film. How does deliberate memory-making shape a film's content and subsequent interpretation? When cine footage is later recontextualized, how might we view it differently if we acknowledge the amateur filmmaker's self-styled role as record-maker? What types of personal or community histories were made through these subjective interventions as self-appointed cine-biographer or cine-topographer? How do we understand the role of amateur material in shaping understanding of the immediate past, in the past as well as in the present? And, importantly, where do these privately made visual histories fit within contemporary debates on the public and popular understanding of past experiences?

This discussion considers two facets of mid-century visual, intentional history-making. Neither is seen as a discrete practice, as individuals often made films for both private and public consumption. They show how cameras were used to capture private and public moments differently and for different audiences, even when working at the simplest level of record-making. Attention focuses first on the amateur newsreel, and in particular the chronicling of local calamity and major moments of change. Contrasting examples drawn from pre- and postwar contexts are then juxtaposed with instances of deliberate wartime record-keeping for later viewing in peacetime. This strand of cine practice was vibrant among independent and more organized groups

of amateur filmmakers in northern England between 1939 and 1945. Despite rationing, travel and lighting restrictions and other constraints upon amateur activity, films were produced for family and wider audiences. The conclusion reflects on how these and other aspects of amateur activity may contribute to a discussion of subjectivity and memory within public history.

Local catastrophes and other news

Local urban catastrophes combine drama, human interest, and speculation over natural or human agency. Floods, fires, and other urban disasters—train derailments, road subsidence, or building collapses—attracted amateur filmmakers and became standard ingredients of many local interest and news films during the cine era. Early cine users had grown up on locally exhibited topicals that provided accessible picture-based news formats shot, processed and screened often within 24 hours. Commercially produced newsreel films brought scenes of destruction, violence, and civil unrest from different settings. Early actuality films informed, entertained, and often captured on screen those bystanders who also wanted to be seen as part of the action. Aspiring cine users similarly strove for a mix of instruction, titillation, consolation, and self-recognition. Moving images of significant local events and unexpected disruptions attracted audiences and were not usually difficult to produce. Novelty and immediacy outweighed the need for technical finesse or optimal vantage points. Amateur newsreels thus generated a distinctive form of nonfiction filmmaking that remained popular with local audiences and continued beyond the introduction of regional television news.

Amateur newsreels appeared from around 1927. They adopted a magazine format, typically showing between ten and 15 events filmed in short sequences over three or four months. Titling was minimal and usually introduced each event giving the date, location, and any personalities involved. Often, captions stated what was then shown on screen. The filmmaker remained invisible unless filmed by a friend. Amateur news compilations typically lasted between eight and 20 minutes and accompanied footage of holidays, domestic, and other films. Some filmmakers produced newsreels over numerous years; others made only a few. Some cine users shifted towards documenting fewer events in greater detail—for instance, royal visits and anniversaries. Although camera ownership increased from the later 1940s and particularly through until the mid-1960s fewer newsreels occurred after a flurry of films relating to the Royal Coronation (1953). As discussed later, exceptions may be set alongside the continuation of newsreel cinemas and the emergence of independent and regional television broadcasting.

Early amateur news film brought local people and places, rather than metropolitan and international events, to family, friends, and other audiences. They used visual conventions already established by commercial operators. Ground level shots and sequences from moving vehicles recur. Trams, buses, and trains offered moving platforms and higher vantage points. Bystander positions at ground level brought viewers more immediately into the scene. Newsreels display the serendipitous nature of amateur record-making as filmmakers mixed deliberate with unplanned shooting. Much footage celebrates the hopes, shared triumphs, and disappointments of local sports teams. Many films capture the burlesque of carnival time and its quirky mix of local business interests and fancy dress, as well as civic pomp and procedure. Such material is affirmative and reassuring in its chronicling of familiar figures and regular events. But this repertoire has another dimension too. Shock and novelty ensured exciting footage. Dramatic local events attracted an audience at a time when cinemas were reducing locally shot material in their programs. Local disasters were even more exciting to see than to read about. They offered compositional and sometimes logistical challenges only if the site was not straightforward to film or if crowds got in the way, as at a fire-gutted railway station in 1934.[2] Human interest was strong because of local links—most people knew someone connected to, or involved in, the event. Loss of life and jobs were ever present in industrial areas. Local disasters, like bad weather, offered local rallying points and were easier to understand in terms of impact than international economic downturns and depression. Sensation was not just for the professional movies: amateurs could bring spectacle and destruction safely into view.

"Cinemas of catastrophe" fulfilled different needs during peace and wartime years. As film stock became cheaper, they varied from brief unedited footage through to lengthy titled and detailed sequences. Some early enthusiasts documented bad weather conditions as an alternative and more recurring disruption to everyday life. At Bentley in South Yorkshire in 1932, Alfred Arnet used his local knowledge of annual floods to film from different viewpoints as river water levels changed in *Bentley Floods, Air Show & Motorcycling*. His sequences show horses being driven chest-deep through water past abandoned motor vehicles. Visual asides show how opportunism emerges quickly as boats sustain communication links along streets and youngsters enjoy spraying water as they cycle along flooded routes. Equivalent scenes of local determination and youthful playfulness typify much footage that records scenes after heavy snowfalls in both rural and urban areas. Outdoor lighting conditions, accessibility, personalities involved, and the filmmaker's status as a locally known insider influence such sequences.

Footage of winters cold enough to prompt extensive outdoor skating or rural buses negotiating deep accumulations of snow evidence both

environmental change and evolving visual practices. Improved focal length gradually gave emergency services greater prominence. Early on, Harold and Sidney Preston depicted firefighters and steeplejacks as silhouetted figures on high walls and chimneys;[3] over 30 years later, a fire fighter posed for the filmmaker D. G. Sutcliffe in *The Great Fire of Morley* after a futile daylong effort to stop flames from spreading from mill buildings adjacent to a town hall.[4] Imaginative camerawork recorded how the town hall clock stopped working moments before its tower collapsed in flames. Other changes in practice occurred too: sequences lengthened and technical improvements such as changing f-Stop facilities on cameras and new capabilities to film in low light were introduced Some films suggest that amateurs became more media savvy and were influenced by media developments elsewhere.

The filmmaker Kathleen Lockwood (1908–97) used cine and still photography to chronicle continuity and change in a small Yorkshire town for personal and public interest. *Holmfirth in Wartime* (c.1941–5) and a later compilation, *Holme Valley in the 40s and 50s* (1940–50), focus on local events and link sequences that were taken over a number of years.[5] Many shots chart how town life reflected a combination of continuity as well as wartime adjustments and contingency. Scenes show school children carrying gas masks on summer nature walks and numerous charity parades in support of the war effort. Lockwood reported the dramatic bursting of a nearby reservoir in May 1944 using footage shot over several days to develop the visual narrative. Rostrum shots of local newspaper headlines summarize the accident: "1,500,000 tons of Flood Water," "Houses, Shops and Mills Wrecked," "Dramatic Escapes," and "Loss of Life. Women and Man Drowned." Closeups of turning photograph album pages show mounted black-and-white images of the event and further footage shows flooded streets, damage, and an extensive cleanup operation. Contextual shots, filmed later, show how normal conditions return to valley life.

Lockwood supplemented the visual details with her own voiceover. The coincidental final preparations for Operation Overlord—opened by the D-Day Allied landings on the beaches of Normandy—meant that even local news coverage had its main focus elsewhere. This film ensured that Holmfirth's own news was not eclipsed by international concerns. The headlines, given wartime paper and print rationing, conferred authority and legitimacy. The film retained the event in popular memory and the cleanup sequence evokes other scenes of home-front resilience. As the circumstances were familiar to her viewers, the film was both instructive and commemorative of community experience. It also enabled people to compare different memories of the event.

Lockwood continued to make and show local news compilations after the BBC and Yorkshire Television began live news reporting in 1968. Again using

intertitles, short montages of local news headlines and her own voiceover on sound tape, she chronicled the demolition of the valley's woolen mills and chapels during the mid-1970s. She charted the destruction by hand and machine of familiar places of work and worship. Local culture and textile history were erased as piecemeal dismantling and controlled explosions brought down the towering bulks of multi-floored mills and their associated weaving sheds and chimneys. Onlookers are shown sometimes, but as the clearances continued, fewer people turned out to watch. The absence of closeups and of shots of people looking directly at the camera contrast with later films of local involvement in tree planting and other environmental improvements. People caught on silent film, whether in the cab of a bulldozer or volunteers wading knee-deep as they clear refuse from the river, smile cheerily as the filmmaker recorded them spontaneously mouthing comments that probably had an immediacy absent from the measured tones of her own voiceovers. Lockwood's self-appointed role as guardian of local memories and traditions extended a lifelong love of teaching children to appreciate their surroundings and also shows the meticulous way in which she produced films for local audiences.

The amateur documentary and news-gathering imperative was very strong and spanned many decades. It linked different media practices as it negotiated its own role in people's mid-century understandings of the everyday and adjusted to changing cine opportunities. As one strand within a rapidly evolving twentieth-century media landscape, recreational cine use was itself generating material that, from the outset, had historical significance. Some filmmakers were clearly aware of the visual history-making capacities of their hobby, as seen by those opportunists who chronicled familiar and more unexpected moments in local life.

Although local disasters soon became old news, where cine footage continued to be shown, its captured events became visual components of shared memory and, over time, proxy memories for those too young to remember, or who were absent at the time. Unlike other news media that was made for immediate consumption, amateur footage, with its built-in time lag between shooting and showing, had a longer local "shelf life" (Baxter 2012).[6] Its different aesthetics and appeal seemed to make longer circulation possible, despite its amateur status. For instance, amateur films have continued to be shown over many years in specific valleys of the Yorkshire Pennines, as a result of a local private collector's personal dedication to safeguard former filmmaking traditions. Using original 16mm projectors and, more recently, newer viewing formats, film shows at local venues for over thirty years have sustained the visibility and familiarity of distinctive and local figures from the past. Younger generations have been able to connect with the visual histories associated with the schools, landscapes, and individuals who were recorded

many decades earlier. More recently, this has been formalized into local film nights hosted as part of film festivals and developed into wider community-based memory and history projects. Exhibiting past amateur material within a festival setting has also linked contemporary local filmmakers to past visual practice in documentary and non-documentary genres. Arguably, where this material has remained in a quasi-public realm of community screenings it has sustained a sense of shared historical experience and identity. It also offers opportunities to familiarize newer residents with a sense of the recent past through informal community events.

As with all historical texts, these subjective narratives should be read with care. Their visual detail remains partial, incomplete, and inscribed with the perspectives of their maker. Class, gender, education, age, faith, occupation, and other variables affected each cine enthusiast's reputation and identity and how he or she chose, gained access to, and dealt with different material. In another filmmaker's hands, how a destroyed mill, flooding, deconsecrated church, chapel, or other fire-wrecked premises affected peoples' lives and livelihoods might be treated differently. Insiders' perspectives embolden the gaze, but reaching under the skin of local life is difficult. The beholding eye of the cine enthusiast yields rich legacies, though his or her versions of the past remain subjective points of view.

Amateur filmmakers who gave public film shows were often already familiar figures within their local communities. Audience responses were defined by pre-existing codes and patterns of association, especially if a filmmaker lived or worked locally. People came to watch these films partly out of curiosity and partly because they knew the filmmaker, perhaps also as a teacher, doctor or local shopkeeper. Watching films and listening to a commentary complied with that relationship and consensual agreement prevailed even if views differed in private. Interviews with people who watched such films as children in the early 1950s identify the novelty of watching films as part of an "occasional evening out." When amateur footage comes into contemporary public settings, even at local level, viewing is framed differently as the original terms of reference no longer exist. Local places and events become alternative connecting threads between past and present. Places, like individuals, are seen to change over time. They hold, as well as elicit, memories. Accessing the past via amateur footage may seem unproblematic when dealing with local histories, but interplay between individual and collective memory occurs and remembering who was in charge of the cine camera is always important.

Filming for happier times

During the Second World War, recording daily life for watching when peacetime returned became another form of deliberate memory-making for amateur filmmakers. Wartime imposed many constraints, but the specialist hobby press that accompanied the rise of amateur activity urged readers to document how civilian life prepared for, and adjusted to, living under threats variously imposed by invasion, bombardment, and general material shortages or deprivation. While some cine users valued opportunities to make films that related to the home-front situation, others resented attempts to ally private leisure pursuits with the national war effort. Much locally filmed footage survives from Britain's war years. It often espouses an instructional tone and offers visual guidance on diverse forms of protecting home, family, and neighborhood. Cine clubs and individuals produced material that ranged from explaining how to use a stirrup pump or prepare for a gas attack, to giving gardening advice, or driving at night and coping in different practical ways with the situation. Essentially, these were local variations on government-produced material covering similar topics.

The hobby press offers insights into contemporary attitudes (Norris Nicholson 2012, 62–91). Maintaining amateur activity for its entertainment value was a recurring message in *Amateur Cine World* (1934–67), one of the key publications that supported the amateur practitioner, albeit as a quarterly rather than monthly magazine during the war years. Club screenings were rescheduled to earlier times and venues met stringent blackout requirements. Film shows were offered to military personnel and Civil Defence groups and arranged to deter evacuees from returning to urban centers. From the press too came calls to record "these pictorial opportunities [that] only belong to wartime" (Grimshaw 1940, 350–56). Along with ration books, allotments and "air-raid instructions on a railway carriage window," readers were asked whether they had filmed "the desolate appearance of the cinemas and theatres … when they were closed" and "the disintegration of those sandbags." "Don't miss your chances—these are the things you will wish to remember when peace comes," one anonymous columnist urged ("Sprocket's New Gate" 1940, 94). Arguably, they were the very details that people might wish to forget temporarily during brief times of recreation.

In Britain, as elsewhere, the amateur hobby press had handed out filmmaking tips from the later 1920s in its earliest short-lived publications. The tone and thrust of this dominant strand of "do-it-yourself" expertise for and by amateur practitioners varied across different national contexts to reflect prevailing ideologies and differences in how amateurs followed their interests independently or in association with the state. By 1940 in Britain

such suggestions perhaps offered comfort and fostered the prospect of a swift return to peace. They anticipated a future time when people might be interested in looking back and seeing how wartime had been documented. This interest in remembering is striking, given the relatively short time since the end of the First World War and the increasing role of amateurs in documenting local commemorative occasions as commercial newsreels gradually focused less frequently on acts of remembrance. The advisory comments thus encapsulate an awareness of different temporalities and foreground the role of amateurs in deliberate recording for future recollection. This capacity to capture incidental testimony elides with intentional care for future understanding of historical experience. Tracing the influence of such writing on individual wartime cine practice would require detailed contextual research and risks making links that are usually hard to verify even when a private collection of cine magazines and manuals is handed in to an archive with a former filmmaker's donated footage. Linking the existence of published practical tips to specific instances of filming is possible as shown by Zechner's detailed study of how one amateur enthusiast based his choice of shots, angles and overall composition on a sequence of stills that were reproduced from Leni Riefenstahl's footage of the 1936 Olympics and published in the German hobby press (Zechner, 2013).[7] More frequently in Britain, amateur advisory writing is simply a reminder of how practical suggestions reflect the hobby's responsiveness to changing circumstances. Thus it is hard to say whether a film's resemblance to printed advice was deliberate or coincidental. Even in wartime, Britain's filmmakers were able to follow their hobby independently and record what they wished apart from the restrictions that were placed on filming in locations that might compromise national security. Published tips for filming "your ID card, respirator … [or] headlamp mask" need not seem unduly formulaic nor do they inherently reduce the impact or historical interest of seeing such items filmed in context (Malthouse 1940, 412–13).

Whether the original impulse was externally prompted or came from parental desire to document the material trappings of a wartime childhood, the outcome was a visual record that has come to be understood very differently. Audience response has shifted from recognition of daily objects with personal significance to identification of historical artifacts from increasingly distant circumstances. Reminders about a filmmaker's intentionality in shaping the shot remain valid when bringing visual material to contemporary audiences.

Scenes of family life filmed during wartime also brim with interpretative complexities. The people present, clothing styles, children's toys, prams, or food served readily signal period details. They provide compelling visual testimony to the continuities and adjustments of domestic life during wartime.

Much has now been written about the peacetime portrayal by amateur filmmakers of domesticity, childhood, sibling relations, parenthood or being grandparents, but there exists less analysis on the process of remembering family life on film in wartime. Thomas Elsaesser's (2012) poignant excavations remind us that we enter more complex worlds of loss, estrangement and compromise once we move beyond the smiling faces recorded on cine film during wartime summer stays at his family's island holiday cottage outside Berlin during the 1940s. Different stories emerge when exploring wartime family scenes from Britain; however, they highlight the difficulties associated with moving personal material into more public settings.

A surprising amount of family film shot in wartime Britain exists, despite the difficulties of obtaining film stock. It was usually shot by older family members, women, and (less often) by service personnel home on leave. It records family gatherings with key people absent, weddings, anniversaries and birthdays, toddlers learning to walk and records of outings, pets, and seasonal change. Fewer incidental shots exist of regular family activities, unless they are familiar scenes and routines visibly affected by wartime need. Many sequences seem to be visual markers of time passing and are endorsements of trying to live as normally as possible in extraordinary times. Implicitly, the act of recording involved creating filmic memories to share during happier times. Shots and sequences tended to use film stock economically as it was in short supply. Editing was often minimal with little or no added captions, although several reels were sometimes spliced together to form compilations of family events that spanned a number of years.

Such footage illustrates the cine user's historicizing impulse. This footage was shot to be viewed in the future, perhaps as surrogate memories for others away at war. Scenes were often celebratory as shared times of companionship and ingenuity in using ration coupons to assemble appropriate clothes and food for a special occasion. They evince hard work and determination in having a good time despite the circumstances. They are commemorative in that they memorialize particular moments of family history. Wartime family films that involve people in uniform seem particularly sensitive, as people's individual futures were so uncertain: military personnel returning on leave, young parents with an infant and, as in one film, the young man who proudly wears his RAF uniform as he receives congratulations and shakes hands. One film by Ernest Hart (1940–42), *Norma's Birthday Party and Family Get-Together*, is edited to footage that shows a birthday party some years earlier at which many of the same people and family dog are also present.

For contemporary viewers, this footage is striking for its colorful cheeriness, the clutter of a lavish high tea spread and its cramped place-settings in a room with tightly drawn curtains. Initially the scene seems a straightforward mealtime with people glancing occasionally towards the camera as

they eat, pass plates, and help themselves and each other to food. Gradually its heightened and unusual quality emerges. A succession of people leaves and joins the table, each one congratulating the young man effusively, and slipping into a place vacated by someone who presumably continues to film the occasion. Camera position and angle remain unchanged and few cutaway shots break the continuity. As the meal continues in real time, participants seem to be less aware of the camera. One recurring shot dwells briefly on a displayed photograph of someone who was present at the first but not the second gathering. The brief stillness and muted colors contrast with the jovial mood.

Seemingly spontaneous and unrehearsed, and almost certainly unexpected for the newly qualified RAF pilot, the occasion involved planning and other cine-using members from the Manchester Amateur Photographic Society to record this special moment. What happened to the young man is not known. He disappears from the family's filmic record, leaving just this special gathering and not even a name. Had he not survived military service, the film would have become a tribute; its significance would be different. He does not obviously feature in any other films taken by Hart, who continued to document holidays, local outings, seaside visits, and domestic occasions with friends and relatives for the next decade. The very act of memorializing certain shared domestic moments also emphasizes the possibility of loss. What seems initially a family meal during wartime contains different and incomplete narratives.

Apart from the eponymous Norma of the film's title, no one else is identified. As viewers we briefly look at the intimate domestic world of family, friends, and siblings and can only infer from age, expression, and proximity what emotional undercurrents and thoughts were behind those half-smiles and glances at the camera. This was no ordinary family meal in wartime: the uniforms, cameras, and simply the amount of food on the table and the people present made it different. When private visual memories are brought into new public settings, they cannot simply be used as period illustrations. Amateur film's apparently consensual versions of wartime and family life are reminders that visual memories brim with untold stories and unanswered questions.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered two strands of cine practice that illuminate the history-making impulses among amateur cine users. It complements the work of other regional pioneers, including Ronald Gow, who ventured into historical dramas or who, like Sam Hanna, made non-fiction "films for posterity."[8] It

shows how enthusiasts combined filmmaking with being family or amateur historians as they shared visual histories in and beyond the home. These filmmakers may be seen as makers of everyday and community histories long before more inclusive public histories attracted popular and academic appeal. In their hands, interests in documentary film and established traditions in producing written and illustrated civic and local area histories converged as they captured familiar places and people in moving images. In so doing, amateurs created material that was valued by their viewers as an unofficial, subjective perspective upon the past, at a time when many written historical accounts strove for objectivity. Their films also offered fine-grained narratives of association and memory that wove together personal and more public narratives of continuity and change, as seen in the individual experience of wartime Britain.

This footage also demonstrates filmmaking skills that range from single vantage point actuality recording to careful editing. It discloses attempts at in-camera storyboarding when documenting local events, points towards distinctive filmmaker–audience relations and later interests in the making and watching of films about local and regional historical change. Amateur visual histories are precursors to the popular histories found in broadcast media and today's amateur historian. They also foreshadow contemporary public appetite for historical material on screen. Amateur film thus occupies an intriguing position, given its own adoption as a contributory medium to popular engagement with historical experience. The intellectual reassessment of amateur film in recent years has been accompanied by its greater visibility in museums, galleries, television, film, and other forms of public history. Nonfiction amateur footage has gained popularity in broadcast histories, and new accessibility through online archiving initiatives. These final paragraphs appraise amateur practices in relation to the continuing debate about different forms of public history.

De Groot (2008) argues that contemporary culture's fascination with the past may be traced through how popular imagination engages with history. How we use, exploit and explore historical meanings, he urges, makes the present-day relationship between academic and non-academic histories complex and multi-faceted as narratives diversify, texts are used differently, and presentations of historical meaning straddle an increasing variety of forms. Arguably, amateur film footage has become one versatile component within this fast changing landscape of historical meaning and practice, as much at risk now from acts of consumption and commodification as other components of the historical record. Amateur film's evocation of ordinariness and everyday lives has a recognizable immediacy rooted in contemporary witness and the compelling process of "being there." It enables armchair visual travelers to bridge time and space, and its accepted role in conferring

authenticity, empathy, and popular appeal may have underlain decisions to broadcast previously unseen footage of Britain's Royal family during the 2012 diamond jubilee celebrations ("Diamond Jubilee").

As original primary material, this footage invites us to see and imagine other people at work and play. It seems to democratize and broaden historical experience even if, for years, ownership was restricted to those who could afford a relatively expensive hobby. Making visible on film people's lives from the past validates personal histories and encourages others to share their perspectives too. Valued as a truthful version of the past, amateur footage displays a distinctive visual aesthetic that has been seen as an under-recognized twentieth-century vernacular art form (Sheldon 2012). Its combination of a seemingly doorstep quotidian folk world and the amateur's extended snapshot gaze derive from the context, equipment and filmmaker's skills. Its appeal to the historical imagination is thus rooted, paradoxically, in both its affective capacity and its evidential acceptance as record of fact.

So while its intimate, private, and personal nature suggests that amateur film footage is well placed to contribute to the current fascination for public history, there are inherent contradictions between form, original purpose, and contemporary function. When footage travels from its former locale into and out of archives, original intentions may be lost as previous stories lose their identity and are framed within newer constructed narratives and interpretations. Footage may feature center-stage, but equally it may feature briefly as a walk-on part in someone else's telling of how things were. Amateur nonfiction film and newsreels, as well as wartime domestic footage, are particularly prone to recontextualization when valued primarily for their evidential status. Private versions of events had specific functions within domestic, local, and community settings that differ from today's broadcast public histories. Appealing, undoubtedly, for their personal eloquence and handheld quality, their contribution relied upon their interplay with other subjective memories. As triggers, they could generate multiple coexistent understandings of a particular event.

While amateur materials could be a surrogate or substitute memory during the act of remembering at the time, their contemporary projection forward as collective memories is more problematic. They lack the shared associational "imprint," in Halbwachs's (1980, 130) words, between place, people, and the genesis of collective memory. Retaining a sense of past filmmakers' authorial intention informs cultural notions of useable pasts and ensures more fluid, multistranded ways of cultural transmission. They are not simply another source of undifferentiated archive footage used to enliven historical documentaries. Amateur news-gathering and history-recording were creative acts of cultural curation by self-appointed keepers of local memories. Their pictures of calamity and celebration helped filmmakers to locate themselves and

others in fast-changing material, cultural, and social landscapes. They helped both to navigate and negotiate meanings, beliefs, values, and knowledge across generations during times when official historiographies and national and international narratives were themselves undergoing re-evaluation. Both the medium and message offered a new malleability and plasticity to linking past, present and future. The same is true now with the advent of new technologies that offer visibility and accessibility. It is these qualities that give the private reels of amateur filmmakers continuing value in an era when visual media have become such a key means of communicating historical experience from local to global level.

Notes

1 Research at the North West Film Archive at Manchester Metropolitan University and the Yorkshire Film Archives was funded by the Centre for Visual and Oral History Research at the University of Huddersfield during 2012 and contributes to two larger projects on twentieth-century women filmmakers and also cinema memories and changing patterns of exhibiting local film in Yorkshire's southern Pennine valleys. Thanks are also owed to archive staff for their help in accessing material.

2 *Trains, Carnivals and Dog Show* (Preston Brothers, 1934).

3 *[Glengarry local newsreel]* (Preston Brothers, 1929).

4 *The Great Fire of Morley. August 18, 1961* (D. G. Sutcliffe, 1961).

5 Kathleen Lockwood's work is being explored further in a collaborative project by Annamaria Motrescu-Mayes and Heather Norris Nicholson, entitled *British Cine-Women and Early Amateur Filmmaking Practices: Home and Abroad*.

6 Ian Baxter is a Yorkshire-based filmmaker and private collector of works by amateur filmmaker Lucy Fairbank.

7 Zechner, Ingo, "How to Make a Movie. Early Manuals for Amateurs." Unpublished paper presented at *Amateur Film Archaeology. An International Conference on the Theory, Practice and Use of Amateur Film*. 23–4 March 2013, Ludwig Boltzmann Institute, Vienna.

8 See, for example, *People of the Lake – A Tale of the Bronze Age* (Ronald Gow, 1927). For a fuller discussion of Gow's historical films, see Norris Nicholson (2013). For discussion of *Old English Crafts; The Clog Block Maker* and other films by Sam Hanna, see Norris Nicholson (2012), 154–7.

6

Glimpses of a Hidden History: Exploring Irish Amateur Collections, 1930–70

Gwenda Young

In an interview with filmmaker Alan Gilsenan for his documentary series *Home Movie Night*s (1996),[1] poet Sara Berkeley, who grew up in the Dublin suburb of Raheny in the 1970s, remembered her father as an avid movie-maker, coaxing his children to pose and perform for the camera, despite their occasional shyness. For the family patriarch, the camera served as a vital tool that allowed him to record the life of his family, from their banal day-to-day activities to their more memorable events and milestones. Like many home movie collections, there is nothing especially remarkable about the footage Sara Berkeley's father shot, at least not to the outsider; rather, its appeal lies in its ability to bear witness to lives lived. This notion of marking a life, providing a tangible record of existence, underpins the process of shooting, and viewing, home movies. Sara Berkeley remembered that when her family would screen the rushes they would be united in shared delight at the events depicted, already collaborating, to use Roger Odin's words (2007), in "the reconstruction of a (mythical) family history" (260), and in the formation of a collective memory. As Berkeley admits, home movies played a fundamental role in the shaping of her adult identity: "I just rely on them for self definition and to reassure me that I've had a life on this planet."[2]

In 2008 the Irish Research Council awarded funding for a collaborative project, *Capturing the Nation: Irish Home Movies, 1930–70*, which aimed to ensure that the Irish Film Archive's collection of amateur films, on a variety of small-gauge formats, would be digitized and preserved for future generations. The contents of these private reels were viewed and evaluated by a

team of researchers from University College Cork (the author, Laura Rascaroli and Barry Monahan).[3] The researchers were interested in some of the core questions that have dominated the field of home movies studies since the early 1980s: Why do we make home movies? What purpose do they serve? How might these records of "ordinary lives" offer glimpses into a nation's socioeconomic fabric, its self representations, its cultural anchoring? More broadly, how do home movies "speak" to us and what are they trying to say?

While questions of national identity and the filmic representations of Ireland and its people by both Irish directors and non-native filmmakers have long been at the core of Irish film history (see Rockett, Gibbons, Hill, 1987; Gibbons 1996; O'Brien 2004), the critical gaze has been mainly fixed on the areas of professional film (both fiction and documentary), with occasional explorations of amateur filmmakers' work (for example, O'Brien's (2004) analysis of the work of Cork animator James Horgan; Chambers's (2012) exploration of the career of Belfast-based amateur director, JJ Tohill).[4] Comparatively little attention has been paid to the films made by ordinary people who recorded their family lives, their local communities, newsworthy events, and, occasionally, experimented with producing short documentaries, fiction films, animated fancies, and travelogues. The scope and diversity of the amateur reels deposited in the Irish Film Archive, previously difficult to access but now newly preserved on digital formats, opens up exciting opportunities for researchers eager to "excavate" a hitherto neglected resource. The team of researchers, aided by research assistants and archivists, viewed hundreds of hours of reels from over 30 collections: the majority of these were shot in the period from 1930 to 1970 and, given the costs involved in the purchase of equipment and the developing of footage in that era, were mainly produced by the better-off members of Irish society. The content of much of these collections coalesces with concerns and subjects favored by amateur filmmakers everywhere: records of trips abroad (for example, Dr. John Fleetwood's interesting footage of trip to the Soviet Union in the 1960s; Charles Horton's views of New York city in the 1960s); family holidays; and scenic shots of rural landscape and emerging urban centers. Strikingly, the same events inspired home moviemakers to bring along their camera and record: birthday parties; Christmas celebrations; fun at the seaside; excursions to Dublin Zoo; trips to Butlin's holiday camp in Mosney; visits to or by grandparents; First Communions; Confirmations, etc.

Yet, some of the footage viewed had quite national-specific nuances—both Charles Horton and Jan de Fouw (an artist who worked for the tourism publication *Ireland of the Welcomes*) used their amateur films to capture fascinating images of traditional cottage industries, then on the brink of dying out. Horton's record of a trip from the "last port" of Cobh to New York suggests an awareness that what he was filming would have particular resonance in a

nation long accustomed to the tradition of emigration. As might be expected in a country that has often seemed dominated by two obsessions—sports and religion—films of horseracing and Gaelic Athletics Association hurling and football matches, as well as footage of religious events and ceremonies, were scattered through almost all collections. While the touristic gaze employed by many non-native filmmakers—from the Kalem company in the 1900s through to *The Quiet Man* (1952) and right up to the present day with such "blarney" films as *Leap Year* (2010)—has helped to propagate an often highly romanticized, sometimes regressive, image of Ireland, there is no doubt that Irish amateur filmmakers evidenced a similar concern with recording the beauty of rural Ireland.[5] Aided in no small part by the spectrum of colors available on Kodak's film stock, the vivid images captured by amateur moviemakers illustrate historian Brian Fallon's (1998) contention that "a powerful nostalgia for the old country ways and the simple, frugal country life" drove artistic representations among an emerging middle class that "looked back emotionally on their rural upbringing" (1).

While the content of much of the reels viewed proved quite commonplace, several collections were rather more compelling, offering valuable records of a specific era, locale or class, or simply demonstrating a sophisticated grasp of film technique and, in some cases, impressive aesthetic flourish. If, as Patricia Zimmermann (2007a) has argued, home movies are "deep condensations of the sociological, aesthetic, economic and cultural spaces of the places and time periods in which they were created and of the people who created them" (9), what do Irish home movies of the 1930s–70s "say" about the how Irish people represented themselves, and others?

The clerical eye: The Fr. Delaney collection

Perhaps some of the most important—and culturally revealing—films deposited in the Irish Film Archive are those shot by members of the Catholic clergy. Archivist Sunniva O'Flynn (2004) has examined what, she posits, may be the "uniquely Irish" phenomenon of clergymen as amateur filmmakers (39). As she notes, it was inevitable that the ultraconservative Catholic Church of the early twentieth century would view the film medium itself with extreme caution—alarmed by the prospect of moral corruption of its flock—but the hierarchy realized it would have been naïve to ignore its didactic potential.[6] Many members of the clergy took up the camera, shooting everything from personal records of the lives of their extended families to trips and pilgrimages, religious processions, visits to local communities by Church hierarchy, and so on. While much of the footage is somewhat tedious, it does underline the centrality of (and the respect accorded to) the Catholic

Church in Ireland in this period. O'Flynn identifies several collections shot by clergy as being of interest, among them the work of Father Jackie Moran who captured many local scenes, Church events, and some documentaries on religious and social themes. Moran worked for a time as a missionary in Australia and some of the footage digitized by the project was of his travels there. If one were to identify consistent representations and themes in his films, apart from specifically religious ones, it may be his sensitivity to landscape and the people and animals within it. While Moran operated almost as a semi-professional filmmaker—O'Flynn notes that he was commissioned to make documentaries for a range of state-sponsored bodies and sporting organizations such as the Gaelic Athletics Association (43)—other priests shot scenes of their own extended families and local communities. Among these was Father Jack Delaney who, while ministering in a parish in north-inner city Dublin in the 1930s, took up his camera to record the local community that lived in the dilapidated tenements around what was once Dublin's most notorious red-light district ("Monto"). A technically proficient filmmaker, Delaney recorded some striking scenes of working-class women outside their homes, images of the local businesses at the heart of the community (in one storefront there is a political poster urging clients to "Vote Labour"), and neatly dressed children playing on the streets and smiling shyly for the camera.

FIGURE 6.1 *Women in North Inner City Dublin, 1930s (Father Delaney collection; courtesy of the Irish Film Archive).*

Delaney's images of an urban landscape, where the remains of the English colonial presence in Ireland could still be seen in the crumbling tenement buildings that had once been grand houses, offer a startling counterpoint to the highly romanticized images of Ireland as a rural, fecund land. Delaney presents us, not with a panoramic view of a red-haired colleen moving gracefully through a pastoral scene, but with shots of women old before their time, worn out by poverty and endless childbearing; with images of children picking through rubble on the streets.[7] Yet, he offered some hopeful scenes—a fleeting image of a happy young couple leaving the local "tin church" that then stood on Gloucester Street—and some gently comic ones (a man snoozes on a dairy cart that bears the name of his employers, Rathmore dairy, a visual reminder of the rural within this urban landscape). While Delaney's films are of great historical significance, representing as they do the working class, urban dwellers that middle-class home movie-makers had little interest in filming, there is some footage that is necessarily unsettling when viewed with a retrospective eye: several scenes were filmed in the grounds of a convent and Magdalene laundry run by the Our Lady of Charity religious order.[8] Viewed today, in the wake of 20 years of revelations about the horrific abuse and neglect suffered by many who were consigned to the care of the Church, these images of the young women who lived and worked in the Gloucester Street laundry—often abandoned by their families because they became pregnant outside of marriage—take on a haunting and deeply troubling aspect. Delaney's footage is a prime example of how home movies can become tinged with new resonances, provoking entirely different emotional responses than had been originally intended. It is quite probable that Delaney had little knowledge of the realities of the lives endured by these "laundry girls" and that he filmed them with an "innocent eye," intent as he was on recording what he perceived as the good work done by the clergy in inner-city Dublin, yet it is his footage that has been usefully appropriated, as visual evidence of the laundries and their inmates, by a number of filmmakers who have produced films on the Catholic Church's involvement in abuse and neglect.[9] In this instance, the appropriation and recontextualization of amateur footage shot by a member of the Catholic clergy is an apt symbol of the Church's own loss of control over the images it produced, but it also serves as a fascinating example of just how empowering recontextualizations can be, and how home movies can send us, in the words of Péter Forgács (2007), "a message with skeletal traces" (49).

Remnants of the Ascendancy: The Leslie collection

If Fr. Delaney's footage is compelling for the glimpses it gives us of working-class life in inner-city Dublin of the 1930s, a quite different sector of Irish society is captured in the collection of the Scots-Anglo-Irish Leslie family. The family's presence in Co. Monaghan dates back to the seventeenth century, but unlike many members of the Ascendancy, the Leslies were deeply involved in their local community and forged an unusually amicable relationship with the native Irish. Some of the Leslie ancestors actively worked to alleviate conditions during the Irish Famine (1845–52), while others ran on Nationalist tickets in political elections. Over the years, the Leslies have cultivated an image of themselves as a colorful, eccentric clan—the current head of the dynasty, Sir Jack Leslie, famously celebrated his eighty-fifth birthday at a rave party in Ibiza—a representation that has proved useful in the marketing of their castle, now a luxury hotel.[10] The Irish Film Archive's holdings of Leslie home movies, dating back to the 1930s, offer a visual portrait of life on a big estate: we see snippets of a tennis match played by ladies and gentleman in formal white attire; of a team of gardeners (presumably employed from the local village of Glaslough) meticulously tending the formal gardens of the demesne; of a young girl riding her bicycle around the estate. Viewed today, the images, so tantalizingly brief, are compelling, echoes of a past age and of a class that would fade out or be transformed as Ireland moved towards modernity. In these short sequences we are invited to observe the lives lived by a class that may seem entirely alien to the contemporary viewer but that once played a fundamental and powerful role in Irish society. Much of the Leslie footage from the 1930s records the grandeur of the estate—the (anonymous) filmmaker anxious to preserve for posterity an image of the impressive scale and beauty of the house, its lake and surrounding lands—but we also see scenes of the neighboring villages and towns, of market days in Monaghan town (of particular interest to the filmmaker are the animals that wander through the streets, most notably an impressively rotund pig that holds the moviemaker's interest for several seconds).

A great part of the Leslie collection dates from a later period (c.1948–80) when the flamboyant Desmond Leslie (1921–80) took up a camera to shoot the lives of his family—his siblings, parents, two wives, and his five children.[11] In an analysis of the Leslie family website, Elizabeth Grubgeld (2006) locates its content and modes of presentation within the larger context of "comic autobiography," a genre that features heavily in Anglo-Irish Ascendancy literary expressions (46).[12] Grubgeld argues that with its "outlandish tales of disorderly descent, domestic discord, and fiscal irresponsibility, the comic

autobiography satirizes the very values on which it is structured" (46). It is no surprise that when Desmond Leslie began to shoot his films, shortly after he assumed the role of the Clan's patriarch, the same comic and irreverent tone would prevail. Some of Leslie's home movies depict the usual domestic scenes—excursions to the beach; children riding horses and playing in the gardens; harvesting scenes; adults posing and performing for the camera—but often filmed with a somewhat eccentric eye. Leslie's footage of a visit to Castle Leslie by Mick Jagger in the 1960s delights in the serendipitous coincidence that a group of nuns happen to be visiting the estate with their teenage pupils in tow. His camera follows as hysteria breaks loose and Jagger must retreat to the Castle's tower for respite from the adoring mob. In footage that Desmond Leslie shot of his second wife, Helen Strong, we see an unabashed voyeuristic gaze from this amateur moviemaker: a day in the beach becomes an opportunity to do more than simply capture a record of their young daughter as she learns to swim; instead, Leslie gleefully shoots his voluptuous wife as she cavorts and poses for the camera. It is quite a contrast to the more bashful, modest images of the Irish middle-class adult, bundled up on the beach, waiting for the inevitable rain to arrive. If, as Grubgeld has suggested, the Leslies "long practiced fantasy as a way of life," (63) it is entirely appropriate that Desmond Leslie's *pièce de résistance* as an amateur

FIGURE 6.2 *"Aliens Invade Castle Leslie:* Them in The Thing, *1956" (The Leslie Collection; courtesy of the Irish Film Archive).*

filmmaker was his sci-fi short, *Them in The Thing* (1956). Shot in the grounds of the estate, and starring his three eldest children, an array of relatives, and Leslie's then-wife, singer/actress Agnes Bernelle, it is a charming slice of whimsy from a man who had a sincere interest in the paranormal and UFOs (he even co-authored a book on the subject). In it, we see "aliens" (two of the Leslie children) landing their spaceship on the grounds, much to the merriment of the children and to the consternation of the disbelieving adults.

One might usefully employ Mikhail Bakhtin's theory on the carnivalesque and the subversion of societal order to aid an appreciation of how *Them in The Thing* delights in depicting a topsy-turvy world where adults are fools and children are wise, or one might simply sit back and enjoy the film's knowingly primitive special effects (the lid of a bin is used for the "flying saucer"; the "aliens" wear costumes helpfully labeled "space suits") and its "amateur," unstructured performances and glimpses of moments certainly not part of the diegesis (including shots of the youngest "alien," bored of the shoot, opting out of his performance).

With their recent reinvention of themselves as modern entrepreneurs, their ancestral home now transformed into a successful hotel that allows guests to experience, if only for one night, the grandeur of the Big House, the films shot by the Leslie ancestors take on new relevance and, perhaps, ironic meaning. Those grainy shots of the seemingly carefree leisured class, playing tennis as servants tend to the gardens and the house, serve as a fascinating visual account of the ancestors whose presence in these now-preserved reels testifies to the same kind of resilience and continuity that has enabled the Leslie family, and its Castle, to survive and to resist relegation to the dustbin of Irish history.

A female view: The Margaret Currivan collection

If the Leslies were a rather eccentric family with a very distinctive lineage, the Currivans of Dublin might be seen to represent the emerging middle class that came to dominate mid-twentieth-century Ireland. The range of the Currivan collection deposited at the Irish Film Archive is confined to a precise period, between c.1956–66, and records the lives of a busy family: P. J. Currivan, his wife Margaret, and their three children, Patrick (b.1948), Dan (b.1953), and Helen (b.1958). Although he was a qualified pharmacist, P. J. was far more interested in the technology of photography and, shortly after his 1948 marriage to Margaret, set up a camera shop, "Currivans," on Keeper Road in the South Dublin suburb of Crumlin. The business appears to have been successful—they frequently advertised themselves as "The Camera People" in the national press of the day—and it continued to run well

into the 1970s. Both P. J. and Margaret were involved in running the shop, juggling the business with home life and extensive hobbies that included an active involvement in the Irish Railway Record Society (P. J.) and membership of an amateur filmmakers organization, the Dublin Cine Club (Margaret).[13] While it is often the case that home movies of the 1950s/1960s were shot by male members of the family (typically the patriarch), in the case of the Currivan collection it was Margaret who was the avid moviemaker and who filmed most of the scenes. In her analysis of home moviemaking, *Reel Families*, Patricia Zimmermann (2005) quotes from American publications that urged the head of the family to embrace the filmic medium, if only to capture images of their children before they grew up: "You can make a permanent record of their childhood—an investment of time that will pay dividends in pleasure for decades to come" (134). Perhaps influenced by those ads—with which, as the owner of a photography shop, she would surely have been familiar—Margaret evidently identified home moviemaking, at least in part, as a suitable way to record her family life. As might be expected, much of the content of Currivan's home movies conforms to the usual scenes captured by home moviemakers everywhere: thus we have shots of Helen's first steps; of her First Communion party; of Dan (who later became an engineer) fixing machinery in the garden; of frequent trips to Butlin's holiday camp.

FIGURE 6.3 *Helen's First Communion, May 1966 (Margaret Currivan collection; courtesy of the Irish Film Archive).*

Yet, it seems that Margaret Currivan saw the camera as more than just a useful tool: as Dan Currivan (2013) has revealed in an email interview with the author, his mother was "extremely creative," a "woman ahead of her time… always looking for new ideas" (1). She was interested in all aspects of the planning, production and editing of her films: "My Mother did all the editing herself—that I remember—as she did explain to me how she did it, running the film on a manual reel to reel device with a viewfinder, then cutting and splicing as she went" (1). As both records of family life and aesthetic experiments, Margaret Currivan's films stand out among the reels of home movies viewed by the author. Displaying a very distinctive and unusual approach to filming the commonplace, one can distinguish a striking appreciation of the image itself, as well as clear understanding of narrative construction. Not for her the fixed middle-distance filming so often employed in home movies: instead, she uses establishing shots, cuts to extreme closeups—of her children's faces, their toys and, most interestingly, food—"arty"/semi-abstract shots, and occasional voiceovers, to capture the world of her children and to vividly bring to life the emotions of experiences.[14]

Common motifs run through the entire collection, as if Margaret Currivan was intent on documenting both change and repetition across the years. Thus, for a span of seven years she recorded Halloween and Christmas celebrations in the same manner: an establishing shot of a title card (for

FIGURE 6.4 *Halloween 1961: Helen and Dan Currivan ("smoking") with Patrick Currivan (in "Goofy" mask) (Margaret Currivan collection; courtesy of the Irish Film Archive).*

instance, "Christmas, 1962"), followed by the "introduction" of the three children, an entrance by a grandparent and perhaps also P. J. and Margaret themselves, and then very specific visual detail: closeups of the food and party decorations on the table and often very tight closeups of the children's faces, so intense that it seems as if she was intent on imprinting them firmly on film, and in memory.

Interestingly, her son (Currivan 2013) has revealed that his mother's films were screened to outsiders and not just to the immediate family: he remembers evenings when the members of her amateur cine club called around to watch her latest home movies and her attempts at longer, documentary-style films (such as a lyrical ode to Dublin's Grand Canal that she shot in the early 1960s). It is perhaps this knowledge that her films would be shown to a wider audience that helped shape Currivan's approach: she was evidently determined to produce footage that would transcend the banal, and that would evince a positive reaction from a cine-literate viewer. Zimmermann (2005) has noted how it was often assumed that images shot by women would show a greater appreciation of the aesthetic and the pictorial (perhaps, it might be inferred, at the expense of narrative construction) (39–40).

FIGURE 6.5 *Margaret and Helen Currivan, outside the family's photography shop in Crumlin, 1964 (Margaret Currivan collection; courtesy of the Irish Film Archive).*

Currivan's films show an appreciation of both: her camera eye seems to revel in the vivid colors of fruits, flowers, toys, and interesting visual juxtapositions and repetitions, and, as her son has confirmed (Currivan 2013), a distinct "story-line," a product of much planning.

According to Odin (2007) "the home movie constructs a euphoric vision of family life" (262), yet with the contextualization furnished by her son, Margaret Currivan's snapshots of a happy family life are now tinged with sadness and poignancy. Ill health forced her to abandon her filmmaking in the late 1960s; her daughter, Helen, whose face stares so strikingly at us in hour after hour of footage, has recently died; and most tragically of all, her eldest son, Patrick, whose life from age seven to his teenage years was so meticulously recorded, left home to forge a future outside of Ireland, only to die on United Airlines Flight 175 on 9/11.[15] If it is only in its ability to bear witness to lives lived, the Currivan collection proves eminently worthy of closer scrutiny.

Conclusion

> "I still need the weight of the past to steady me in the present." (Sara Berkeley, *Home Movie Nights*)

It is perhaps axiomatic that only by understanding the past can we begin to comprehend our present and look to our future. As this overview of a selection of Irish amateur collections has hopefully shown, there exist hidden riches that are waiting to be "mined" in the archive. These "private reels" offer intriguing glimpses of the past life of a nation; testaments to cultural values that may, in recent years, have been lost or (justly) interrogated and exposed as flawed; and records of lives lived. As scholars of home movies have often noted, viewing footage of past generations certainly presents us with challenges: There is the inevitable repetition and monotony; a frustration with the gaps in our knowledge; a poignancy that comes with the realization that many of the subjects, once depicted in all their vitality, are likely deceased. It can sometimes feel intrusive, overly intimate, to watch these private lives on screen, but it can also be immensely intriguing, amusing, baffling, and, at times, rewarding. Now firmly ensconced in a digital age that has truly democratized filmmaking, it is interesting to note how we are still drawn to the simplest home movies; that the films that most appeal are those that evoke a nostalgia for the past or that portray an instantly-recognizable snippet of "real life." Two of the most discussed Irish home movies in the past two years, "Driving in Dublin in 1976" (2011) and "Irish Mammy Giving Grief to Her Son" (2013), offer us simple images, basic technique and little context

(in the former, a car is filmed driving through the streets of Dublin; in the latter, a teenage boy is scolded by his mother who, with her stream of colorful language, certainly subverts the usual representation of the "Irish Mammy"). Somehow these films have struck a chord with YouTube viewers, perhaps drawn to their very ordinariness, even banality. If Berkeley is correct—that we need the "weight of the past" to define and secure our present—then we must look beyond the canon of Irish cinema for clues to how our cultural identity has been formed; in doing so we will shape a critical gaze that is more inclusive.

Notes

1 Examined in more detail by Barry Monahan in this collection.

2 In Gilsenan's *Home Movie Nights* (1996) several of the home moviemakers admitted that their filming was driven by a dual desire: to record their family lives before time slipped away, and to furnish future generations with visual evidence of the past. Or, as prolific filmmaker Dr. John Fleetwood put it: "It's important to know where we came from."

3 The project involved collaboration with the Irish Film Archive (Head of the Irish Film Archive, Kasandra O'Connell and Senior Curator, Sunniva O'Flynn). Three research assistants, Ciara Chambers, Corinna Connolly, and Abigail Keating, were employed to digitize the footage on a Flashscan, to liaise with donors, and to produce a noncommercial DVD, *Capturing the Nation* (2010), featuring samples of the footage organized under various categories such as "travelogues," "actualities," and "home movies."

4 While O'Brien's (2004) comprehensive study of the documentary tradition in Irish film mainly concentrates on the work of professional filmmakers, he concedes that the amateur eye also merits scrutiny: "Though less technically and conceptually advanced than their international counterparts, entrepreneurial or merely enthusiastic non-professionals produced work that embodies nascent steps in the conceptualisation of everyday life" (31).

5 The image of Ireland as an "imagined" landscape has been examined by a host of critics and historians, from the seminal Rockett, Gibbons and Hill's *Cinema and Ireland* (1987), to more recent explorations by Gibbons (1996), Cronin (2003), and Rains (2003).

6 O'Flynn (2004) points to Pope Pius XI's 1936 papal encyclical "Vigilanti Curi – On Motion Pictures" and notes how the Catholic Church also played a key role in the evolution of a National Film Institute (from 1943).

7 Delaney's footage of Gloucester Street was shot at a time of transition for the street: Dublin Corporation was in the process of "redeveloping" it, in an effort to eliminate some of the slums. The street was also rechristened, in a nod to Ireland's relatively new independent status, as Seán MacDermott Street (named after an Irish patriot executed by British forces following the 1916 Easter Rising).

8 For more on the history of the Magdalene laundries (often spelled as "Magdalen") in Ireland, see Smith (2007).

9 O'Flynn (2004) notes that documentary filmmaker Christophe Weber used the footage in his exploration of the Magdalene laundries, *Les Blanchisseuses de Magdalen* (1998). Delaney's images of the women of the Gloucester Street laundry was also subject to one of the most significant appropriations of amateur footage in commercial cinema: in 2002 director Peter Mullan, having viewed some of Delaney's footage, reconstructed it in his film, *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002), in a scene in which an abusive priest voyeuristically films the women. Although Mullan gave the character another name ("Fr. Fitzroy"), it was an appropriation that caused great distress to the Delaney family who felt that the reputation of Fr. Delaney had been tainted (there was no evidence that Delaney was involved in any abuse).

10 The Castle's website carries amusing anecdotes about the antics of the Leslie family over the years and stories about the eclectic range of the famous people that have visited it, from Winston Churchill to Mick Jagger and Paul MacCartney (who married second wife Heather Mills there). Elizabeth Grubgeld (2006) has examined the content and construction of the CastleLeslie.com website in more detail.

11 Desmond Leslie's colorful life has been recorded in a recent biography by Robert O'Byrne (2010). O'Byrne recounts Desmond Leslie rebuking the writer of a travel guide who had called the Leslie family "mildly eccentric." They should, Leslie pointed out, have been described as "very eccentric" (7).

12 In the case of the Leslie family, their lineage includes Irish, Scots and English.

13 Harcourt Street was something of a hub of film-related activity in the 1950s and 1960s: no.65 housed the National Film Institute of Ireland, many of whose members were involved in the Dublin Cine Club (and the club held their meetings in these premises). Further along the street was the headquarters of The Irish Film Society, an important organization founded by filmmaker and historian Liam O'Leary, with Edward Toner, in 1936 and committed to developing Ireland's film culture. It screened films from around the world and also encouraged film production (see Hoctor 2006). I am most grateful to both Kevin Rockett (Trinity College Dublin) and Sunniva O'Flynn (Irish Film Institute) for filling in some of the details on these organizations.

14 In an email interview with the author, Dan Currivan (2013) has confirmed that Margaret was not interested in adopting a mere "point-and-shoot" technique.

15 Patrick Currivan's life is memoralized online (2001).

7

Uncensored British Imperial Politics in Late Colonial Home Movies: Memsahibs, Indian Bearers and Chinese Communist Insurgents

Annamaria Motrescu-Mayes

Ignored, and for many years dismissed as a film genre, amateur cinema is now emerging as *l'enfant terrible* of cultural studies, covering film as well as political, gender and historical scholarship. Moreover, in the last few decades, home moviemaking and poetics have attracted such a surge in academic interest that claims that home movies inform valid and complex records of private and public history have become tautological (see Zimmermann 1995; Odin 1995d; Roepke 2006; Zimmermann and Ishizuka 2007; Craven 2009; Cuevas 2010; Norris Nicholson 2012).[1] However, while this is true for most home movies, and for their intrinsic visual memorialization of events and people, some also challenge and disclose history from within unexpected and exceptional records of lesser-known events.

Many British colonial home movies show accidental, uncensored records of public memory, racial hierarchies, and gender tensions that often overwrote and challenged governmental imperial and political agendas. Such fortuitous records were usually filmed by chance, eluded the filmmaker's initial thematic choice, and were never edited. Having been viewed as void of any narrative coherence or historical relevance for many years, some of these films now reveal unexpected details of British imperial identities and cultures within innovative methodologies and critical recontextualizations.

This chapter discusses several examples of such uncensored, accidental scenes, and confirms their documentary merit and historic significance to today's British political and media studies. Three British colonial amateur filmmakers, two women and a man, made the films from which the research corpus has been selected for this study. The Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge, and the Bristol City Council Archive now hold their film collections.[2] Accepting the thesis that the study of British colonial amateur films, and of home movies in particular, offers credible counter-narratives to the conventional, official, and commercial visual historiography of the British Empire, this chapter explores scenes of apparently mundane domesticity filmed by Lady Isabella Claire Kendall (née Rothwell, 1884–1956) and Dame Eleanor Isabel Dalyell (1895–1972) in the 1930s, and of the horrific "normality" of the counterinsurgent jungle operations recorded by Captain Roy Edgerton Wilson (1921–2009) during his tour of duty in Malaya in the mid-1950s. It also looks at the ways in which gendered, racial and political identities have been visually negotiated, silenced, obliterated, or disclosed by these three colonial amateur filmmakers.

The aim of this chapter is to explore across the selected scenes a more nuanced understanding of the poetics defining colonial home-movie practices, as well as to assess colonial home moviemaking as a robust cultural tradition that often challenged traditional historiography. Moreover, this chapter acknowledges, and contributes to, ongoing scholarship concerned with the use of film as a reliable source in the teaching of history (Grenville and Pronay 1968; Lindgren 1971; Smith 1976; Sorlin 1980; Murray 2002; Rosenstone 2006). It also explores the use of nonfiction and colonial amateur films as legitimate research sources for British imperial studies (Scott 2011; Sanogo 2011; Motrescu 2011). It is in this research framework that the exploration of home movies as equally valid social documents is currently gaining momentum (Mauro 2012). This chapter will demonstrate how several unplanned, unofficial and, at times, accidentally subversive home-movie scenes can "rewrite," re-present, and disclose details about imperial, governmental, and racial ideologies outside traditional cultural assumptions. Finally, it will confirm that the study of British colonial amateur films often offers possible counternarratives to the conventional, official, and commercial visual historiography of the British Empire.

Negotiating front-stage colonial identities

A key feature of British popular culture from colonial times is represented by amateur film practice. This cultural practice has been largely neglected in terms of its historic relevance to the construction of British imperial identity.

As visual documents, these films offer a first-hand research source for deciphering aspects of British colonial life and psyche and of specific imperial, racial, social, and cultural dynamics. Thus, within new scholarly trends that challenge the British national memory, colonial home movies act as catalysts for reinterpretations of Britain's imperial past.

Although traditionally seen as a predominantly male hobby, amateur filmmaking across the British Empire has also been a pastime embraced by women. It thus becomes possible to identify a gender-based visual narrative across British colonial amateur filmmaking; one particularly well endorsed by the thematic choices and shared visual literacy of women amateur filmmakers. Their visual or cinematic literacy informed various articulations of self-representations and self-imagining and reveals cultural constructions that legitimized specific gender-based visual narrative patterns (Kuhn 1994). Most interwar colonial amateur films offer images of what one was expected to be and of how he or she was to behave, according to his or her imperial social status. Without proposing a prescribed gender-based thematic framework, there is however a distinctive set of topics and colonial contexts that appears to have been preferred by women amateur filmmakers. This thematic schism was typically determined by prescribed social contexts rather than by gender-based preferences, i.e. women filmed their immediate and often socially claustrophobic world of homebound activities, children, pets, servants, and the leisure interests they shared with other British female companions. At the same time, men filmed topics informing their daily administrative, entrepreneurial, and military activities, travels, sports, cars, railways, factories, and industrial and agricultural infrastructures. However, there are exceptional instances when the above set of domestic versus public spheres, corresponding to feminine versus masculine worlds, was inversed. For instance, in the 1930s Eleanor Dalyell filmed her husband's travels across the North West Frontier Province, his meetings with North West Frontier tribal chieftains, military parades, and official meetings. She also recorded remarkable events relevant to Bahrain's interwar political and cultural context, including the dance of emancipated slaves outside the British Agency in Manama, Bahrain, during the Id al Fitr festivities (January 20, 1934), and ceremonial rituals and traditional Khaliji dances (Gulf-style dances) performed by Arab women during the wedding festivities of one of the Sheikh of Bahrain's sons, in April 1934.

In the colonial tradition of gender dynamics, British women acquired and perfected social skills that enabled them to act within certain behavioral strictures while often being stereotyped as enjoying a purely frivolous life of leisure, one in which they remained "confined … in cages like the feathered race" and with nothing better to do "but to plume themselves" (Wollstonecraft cited in Donovan 2000, 24). Thus, even in the late colonial era British women acted as their husbands' guarantors of a reputable public

image, caretakers of the "little empire-builders of the future" (MacMillan 1996, 14), leaders of an imperial enterprise in miniature—their homesteads—and often as experienced and proud hunters. At the same time, British "men were very suspicious of their women moving out of th[is] particular groove, out of their particular role," and when they did step out of their assigned roles they became "a threat to the whole society" (Iris Mcfarlane, V091, BECM). It was in this context that most women who embraced amateur filmmaking acted as representatives of colonizing credos, as well as gender-commodified subalterns of imperial paternalism. However, by embracing the hobby of home moviemaking, they also acquired, almost by default, a new form of freedom and the chance to reinvent themselves and their immediate world independent of the "restrictions of patriarchy and sexual norms" (Zimmermann 1996, 94).

One of the British women's prerequisites while living in colonial outposts was that they should be "taking an intelligent interest in the country, in the natives, and in … immediate surroundings" (Procida 2002, 105). Most British women amateur filmmakers met this requirement by recording portraits of local communities and landscapes, records that illustrated within a tourist-gaze agenda the generally accepted, expected and exoticized behavior and culture of non-Western/European peoples (Urry 1990). However, some of the British women amateur filmmakers' unofficial, uncommissioned, and private first-person visual narratives succeeded in transcending traditional historical discourses, and so enhance our understandings of political, racial, and gender transformations within the British Empire (Kaplan 1983; McCabe 2004). Thus, their cinematic vocabulary confirmed as well as challenged gender and racial hierarchies that were customarily shaped and promoted by British popular imperial culture. Moreover, when joining their husbands on home leave in Britain, their home movies became visual journals compiled by estranged parents visiting their children who, according to the imperial childrearing protocol, were sent "home" to Britain at an early age to receive a "proper education." When viewed later in a colonial context such scenes would provide, via repetitive projections, a form of tourist-like parenting, a perpetual family reunion of an otherwise unachievable imperial familial nucleus (Buettner 2004). Lastly, the films made by British women amateur filmmakers showed the Empire from a gender-marginalized and yet crucially critical perspective that often challenged official imperial narratives. It is also possible that some British women amateur filmmakers approached their home moviemaking as an act of gender liberation and a step toward modern times (O'Sullivan 2000).

The first example discussed here is an excerpt from the *Kendall Collection* filmed by Lady Isabella Claire Kendall, wife of Sir Charles Kendall, Acting High Judge of High Court in Allahabad in the early 1930s. It is an extremely short

FIGURE 7.1 *Kendall Collection, Naini Tal, India, 1932 © Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge. Screenshot.*

sequence filmed during a picnic attended by the Kendall family and some of their friends. It shows a small group of Indian Colonial Service men with their wives, enjoying a picnic in the mountainous landscape of Naini Tal, Uttarakhand. An Indian bearer attends to them, standing nearby in a central position as if presiding over the event. The scene gains new meanings and proposes a different, more nuanced reading of the events once it is played in slow motion, almost in a frame-by-frame projection. This time it becomes evident that one of the British women, perhaps Lady Kendall's oldest daughter, Barbara Donaldson, having looked attentively at the camera, turns her head towards the servant and stands up. At this point, the recording stops suddenly only to start again when the woman is already standing next to the Indian servant. Without even glancing at him, she positions herself in front of him, smiling and looking at the camera. The Indian servant steps aside to the left and regains his central position. The woman, too, steps aside and once again conceals his body. Moreover, she also stretches her arms with an ample gesture and, for an instant, completely obscures his presence. In order to be visible again, the Indian man steps aside for the second time just before the recording stops abruptly.

It is possible to argue that this scene decodes details of colonial, gender and racial dynamics that go beyond any presumptive ludic performance; it

also shows an example of how two different people exercised tactical forms of self-representation and control. Their need to be "in the picture"—to become a permanent visual mark of that very moment—determines in a simultaneous and equal measure the strategies used by the Indian man and the British Memsahib in securing their own cinematic portraits.[3] It would appear that the man wants to preserve his central position in the frame while the woman fights for the "correct" image, for the proper and conventional colonial framework in which she, and her companions, presumably wanted to be immortalized on film. Viewed in slow motion, this scene shows a case of imperial dynamic between colonized and colonizer; between the local host—the Indian servant was at home in India—and the British guests, the Raj, who struggle through the woman's actions to be in charge. Borrowing briefly one of postcolonial studies' "fetish" terms—Edward Said's *Other* (1979) —it could be argued that in this scene, it is not the Indian Other but the British Otherness that becomes explicit. Thus, it is important to note the ad hoc gag devised by the filmmaker—a "hide-and-seek" game that in its brevity and awkward, almost mysterious, logic accounts symbolically for the way in which both Indian and British people fought for an independent and self-ruling identity in interwar India. Meant initially as a record of a pastime shared with family and friends, Lady Kendall's home-movie scene of the Naini Tal picnic reveals a more complex visual discourse informing gender and racial politics in the last decades of the British Raj.

The second example of an unwitting representation of gender and racial politics belongs to a sequence by Eleanor Dalyell filmed sometime in the early 1930s, when her husband, Colonel Percy Gordon Loch, was secretary to Sir Stuart Edmund Pearse, the Mysore Resident. In this case, the visual narrative relies on the use of both film and photo cameras and includes an example of involuntary framing. Once again, the practice of self-referential portrayal concerns two similar subaltern colonial voices: that of a British Memsahib and of an Indian bearer. This brief sequence has two important characteristics. First, it is a rare instance of Colonel Loch operating the film camera—as amateur filmmaking was his wife's hobby. Second, it functions as an accidental record in the context of Eleanor Dalyell's collection since it is awkwardly inserted in a long scene showing her husband hunting crocodiles by the riverbank.

The sequence shows an Indian bearer formally dressed with turban, belt, and tunic. He is also wearing a large medal, possibly a First-World-War distinction. At first, he acts for the camera by carrying a single drink on a platter and walking towards the camera until his face is framed in a closeup. The second half of the sequence shows the same Indian servant, this time without his tray, positioned to the far-right side of the frame. Eleanor Dalyell's body is visible in the left corner of the frame, almost in a diagonal line to the

FIGURE 7.2 *Dalyell Collection, Mysore, India, 1928–32 © Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives. Screenshot.*

servant. She is dressed in a three-quarter trousers and pullover and wears a *sola topi*. With her back to the camera, she takes pictures of the Indian man. Suddenly, she seems to have a technical issue and the filmmaker pans to the left as if answering her call for help. With this camera movement Colonel Loch leaves out of the frame the Indian bearer—the subject of his film and of his wife's photographs—and so the Memsahib becomes the subject of the film. In the final scene, Eleanor Dalyell walks in the direction of the Indian servant while facing the film camera. She moves awkwardly, at some distance, until she finally stops to his left and slightly behind him. With small gestures, she arranges her pullover over her hips as if securing a "proper" look. She positions herself guardedly—not too far, yet not too close—in relation to the Indian bearer and then remains motionless, waiting. Both Eleanor Dalyell and the Indian bearer look straight at the camera with stiffened poses, silently. They form a group portrait marked by their inherent colonial, gender and racial Otherness.

In this scene, Colonel Loch's arbitrary gaze, while filming on behalf of his wife, conveys the colonial discourse. At the same time, the imperial encounter between the British woman and the Indian man discloses uncensored identities. The Memsahib's and the Indian bearer's unspoken thoughts are manifested in their body language, through their self-conscious posing

and in their acknowledgment of the filmmaker's presence from a common, shared perspective. Their particular identities find an expression in visual tropes of gendered and ethnic intricacies specific to British rule in India. Eleanor Dalyell, a white Memsahib signifying the British Raj, chose her place near the Indian bearer while performing according to her colonial status and being alert to imperial appearances. For his part, the Indian bearer, signifier of colonized India, remained unperturbed, looked straight at the filmmaker and apparently ignored the proximity created by Eleanor Dalyell. As is often the case with colonial amateur films, this sequence shows elements of gender and racial dynamics representative of the imperial encounter, and unwittingly represented by the amateur filmmaker.

These short home-movie scenes propose an uncensored visual literacy of the British rule in India in the 1930s and reveal the diversity and the intricacies of racial, gendered and imperial relationships. It is from this perspective that their films should be approached and understood as a catalyst between conventional historiographic representations of the British Raj and emerging research methodologies and theories in imperial and women's studies.

"Off the record": Counterinsurgency and cruelty in color

In the mid- and late 1950s, Captain Roy Edgerton Wilson served in Malaya as a senior pilot with the Royal Navy 848 Helicopter Squadron. During his tour of duty, he made several home movies about his family's leisure activities and British military counterinsurgent operations in the Malayan jungle, during the time of the Malayan Emergency (1948–60).[4] Wilson shot his films entirely on 8mm color film and, with one exception, they do not contain intertitles, titles, or voiceover commentary. They include scenes of the Royal Navy helicopters transporting troops and supplies into the jungle, Orang Asli (Malay aboriginal people) jungle forts, British family domestic scenes with Malay servants, scenes of Singapore at night, and Australian troops operating Lincoln and Dakota bombers for supply drop missions. The longest reel in his collection, of about 22 minutes, is titled *Operations in Malaya* and opens with a map of Malaya before showing the 848 Squadron's Sikorsky S-55 helicopter operations alongside the 22 SAS (Special Air Service) Regiment, Orang Asli tribes, and the parachuting of troops and supplies into the jungle. This is one of Wilson's important contributions in documenting some of the 848 Squadron's operations, which supplied about 14,000 troops during the Emergency (Short 1975, 370). Occasionally, Wilson used nameplates and signposts to introduce his subjects such as "RNZAF" (Royal New Zealand Air Force) Transport plane

(c.1957), a speed limit sign for the Frasers Hill, and blackboards reading "[No.3 Police Field Force] Fort Iskandar" and "Aborigines School Fort Shean." These notes point to the presence of Commonwealth counterinsurgency forces in the "Operation Firedog"—the RAF's air campaign against communist insurgents—RAF bases, and jungle forts. Also, his scenes of Orang Asli tribes filmed at jungle forts such as the Fort Shean are indicative of Malay indigenous people's involvement in counterinsurgency missions (Harper 2001). At the time when Wilson made his films, several British anti-guerrilla jungle operations relied on the help of Orang Asli recruits. While some were trained by the 22 SAS Regiment, the majority of Orang Asli forces belonged to fighting units like the Aboriginal Auxiliary Police, the Police Aboriginal Guards, and the Senoy Praaq special paramilitary force (Scurr 1982; Jumper 2001). Wilson's other films from Malaya also include brief scenes of Gurkha soldiers during jungle patrols and aerial views of the Malayan jungle.

Owing to Wilson's predominant choice of military topics, his collection of home movies resembles the footage filmed by service cameramen and later included in newsreels and government-sponsored instructional films.[5] His choice of color film stock maximizes the exposure of minute military and ethnographic details. Wilson did not edit his films in postproduction, i.e. he started and stopped the camera depending on his interest in a subject or a person. Most importantly, his filming technique often relied on steady camera shots and accurate framing. Two key topics are recurrent in Wilson's Malayan films: the representation of aboriginal people and jungle operations. His interest in indigenous communities often resulted in records that combine a tourist angle with amateur ethnography. Wilson's approach to filming Malayan aboriginal communities appears at times intrusive and domineering. This becomes evident in several close and medium-close shots of seminaked Orang Asli women posing awkwardly, or of tribal groups staring nervously at the camera. While wariness towards the British pilot or unfamiliarity with Western technology could be a reason for the Orang Asli's reaction to being filmed, this is not likely the case as, by the mid-1950s, most of these communities were accustomed to British military operations. This can be seen in other scenes filmed by Wilson in which the communities interact unreservedly with helicopter pilots and with troops. On these occasions, Wilson chose to mix close-ups of aboriginal women with medium-long shots of British pilots working on their helicopters. One of these brief sequences begins with a portrait of a young Orang Asli woman looking straight at the camera and ends with her being filmed in a long shot, posing timidly next to a Royal Navy helicopter as if she were a pale impersonation of American pin-up girls promoting a military aircraft. Notwithstanding Wilson's tourist gaze and manipulative framing of the Orang Asli woman, this scene reveals two layers of "raw" visual documents. The first confirms the partnership between Malay

aboriginals and British forces during anti-guerrilla missions in the Malayan jungle. The second translates a possible psychological feature shared by most men serving alongside Wilson, for whom the exoticism of aboriginal women was almost on par with the sex appeal of poster-girls and movie stars. While the Orang Asli woman in Wilson's scene was denied the opportunity of self-representation, it was the filmmaker's own uncensored and implied self-representation that emerged as the main subject of his filming: The way that he filmed the young women and other tribal people exposed his cultural references that were still anchored in imperially driven racial and gender hierarchies.

In spite of his almost professional filming skills, Wilson was never recruited as a RAF service cameraman, nor were his amateur films included in newsreel items about the 848 Squadron's jungle operations. Most of his scenes showing patrolling in the Malayan jungle are almost identical to those found in government-commissioned propaganda material on jungle warfare or in British Pathé Newsreels such as *Jungle Raid in Malaya* (1952). In all of these films, scenes of British soldiers slowly advancing through thick jungle vegetation or in chest-deep swamplands are interspersed with images of Chinese communists' jungle camps post-ambush and of helicopter rescue operations. Captain Wilson's *Operations in Malaya* film seems at first to follow an identical narrative pattern across scenes of helicopter maneuvers, medical and food supply drop missions, parachuting troops in the jungle, casualties rescued by helicopter, and soldiers stationed at jungle forts. His unedited film contains, however, brief records of lesser-known and almost never broadcast instances of jungle warfare—for example, a series of rapidly edited-in-the-camera medium and close shots of a group of British soldiers at their jungle camp. The sequence was filmed in color and it is because of this that it is possible to identify a particular detail in one extremely short scene among those showing the soldiers preparing lunch in tin cups, checking their weapons and smiling at the camera. While in the case of Lady Kendall's film of the picnic in Naini Tal the narrative structure of a scene becomes clearer when projecting it in slow motion, in the case of Wilson's film it is necessary to watch this particular short scene in an almost frame-by-frame projection so that a certain object can be properly identified. Had it been filmed in black and white, the object would have appeared as an out-of-focus, square and long piece of luggage lifted off the ground by several soldiers. Seen in color, this piece of luggage reveals itself as a plastic bag containing the corpse of a Chinese communist insurgent. The following scene features a closeup of a worried Malay boy, followed by images of British soldiers having their lunch at the camp. Apart from documenting one of the customary methods for transporting captured and killed insurgents across the jungle, Wilson's short scene of the killed Chinese insurgent contains an element of historical disclosure.[6]

FIGURE 7.3 *Wilson Collection, Malaya, mid 1950s © Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives. Screenshot.*

It uncovers an unsettling detail about the "normality" of British anti-guerrilla jungle warfare and exposes an uncensored instance of the terror experienced by British, Malay and Chinese people during the Malayan Emergency.

While the government-funded newsreels illustrated tabloid headlines aligned to the British official agenda and war propaganda, Wilson's color scene reveals the terror of the Emergency in unwitting, novel terms. It is important to mention that newspaper illustrations of British servicemen holding the heads of decapitated communist insurgents killed in the jungle—the easiest method of transporting them to the forts or cities for identification—or other images of jungle warfare cruelty had been prohibited by the British government shortly after the start of the Emergency (Carruthers 1994; 1995). Moreover, the use of color film stock locates Wilson's Malayan films outside the politicized remit of government-commissioned newsreels and documentaries, which were also almost entirely shot and broadcast in black and white. Owing to what is sometimes called the color-film effect of a more real, life-like representation (McCoy 1962), and to the assumption that the use of color might contribute to the "impression of reality" in film (Baudry 1976), the scenes filmed by Wilson create a sense of immediacy and proximity with the images of deported Chinese squatters, Orang Asli or British Special Forces. Lastly, Wilson's films are first-person narratives that foster a personalized

view of events otherwise only known through official, propagandistic and censored black-and-white films. His was a personalized view that challenged recurrent counterinsurgency portrayals of the Chinese "terrorists," disclosed the horror of jungle warfare, and occasionally offered several uncensored, unofficial accounts of the Emergency.

Conclusion

This analysis of home-movie scenes showing British Memsahibs and Indian bearers revealing their gender and racial front-stage roles and presence, and the brief scenes of a young Orang Asli woman and of a dead Chinese communist insurgent carried in a plastic bag, aims to confirm the connotative richness and historic relevance of such visual records to public and official imperial memory. It has also highlighted the need for adaptable investigative perspectives when discussing colonial home movies within varied narrative and stylistic frameworks. By evaluating these scenes' informative merit and exploring how unexpected images of social tensions, racial politics, military operations and "strategic" cruelty invalidate the alleged monotonous narrative of home movies, it can be demonstrated that colonial home moviemaking is almost always the subject of ongoing critical enquiries. In contextualizing records of British imperial history within the aesthetics of colonial home movies, it may be suggested that the discussion of private, uncensored images of imperial identities and events should be constantly exposed to new analytical methodologies. This is made evident by the fact that many British home movies contain "accidental" scenes able to illuminate particular imperial politics, mores, traumas and psychologies. As a cultural tradition that often challenged traditional historiography, British home movies are immensely relevant to the understanding, research and teaching of today's British identities and political communities.

Notes

1 For a more complete bibliography of amateur cinema studies see http://amateurcinemastudies.org/small-gauge-and-amateur-film-bibliography/

2 The Bristol City Council currently hosts the entire film archive that belonged to the British Empire & Commonwealth Museum. The museum was officially closed in 2008.

3 Memsahib was the official and polite term of address for European women in colonial India.

4 British and Commonwealth forces fought the predominantly Chinese

communist insurgents at a cost of £100 million a year, in U.K. currency of the time (Stockwell 2001).

5 See, for instance, newsreels such as *Helicopters for Malaya* (Pathé News, December 11, 1952), *Malayan Operations – Patrol through Jungle* (British Movietone, 24.03.1952), and Admiralty-commissioned unedited footage like *848 Squadron in Malaya* (1953), *Malaya High Commissioner visits 848 Squadron* (1954), and *Aerial Views of the Malayan Jungle* (1955).

6 Several scenes from the *Wilson Collection* have been included in the TV documentary *The British Empire in Colour* (Carlton TV, 2002), in the episodes "Malaya Emergency" and "Jungle Warfare," but not the one showing the plastic bag containing the corpse of the Chinese communist insurgent.

8

The Amateur Film: From Artifact to Anecdote

Karen Lury

This chapter concerns one amateur film—*The Chief's Half Day* (W. S. Dobson, 1961)—and presents a narrative that reflects on the analytical process of interpretation and evaluation. It suggests that the status of this and other amateur films as both artifact and anecdote enables a closeup investigation of the objects and of human and nonhuman agents that they represent. It also prompts larger questions about the status of such films as historical evidence. In this instance, my research suggests that *The Chief's Half Day* not only functions as an illustration of an eccentric and colorful Scottish individual (the eponymous "Chief"), but also represents a Scottish adaptation of the "Disneyfication" of childhood during a specific time period. In so doing, it provides evidence for the widespread adoption and advocacy of a pervasive symbolic and ideological construction of childhood that had a direct impact on children's lives in the latter part of the twentieth century. The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that, by refusing to marginalize or exclude as trivial the experiences or representations of children and animals in the film, it is possible to revisit and elaborate upon larger (macro) histories of church, child welfare and morality in Scotland.

Like much amateur media, *The Chief's Half Day* resists many of the conventional operations of film analysis, both formally and in relation to context, in large part because there are abrupt changes of scene, there is no sound, and because so little is known about the director's intent and the anticipated audience for the film. Although the film does superficially operate as a self-contained narrative, the awkward changes of scene act as ellipses. These gaps therefore require the researcher to restore the film, attempting not just to make sense of what can be seen on screen but also to expose,

and, where possible, "fill in" those elisions. Given that the film's protagonist was relatively well known at the time of production, it may have been expected that contemporary viewers would have been able to fill in these gaps of knowledge themselves. However, the researcher confronted with the same film in an archive over 50 years later finds this much more difficult and must therefore attempt to restore this once-common knowledge. This chapter takes up the challenge and offers a historical recontextualization of the film which works in tandem with a symbolic and ideological interpretation of the film's form, narrative and content. First, the film is interrogated as an artifact—as a material object of history and as illustrative of both historical figures and contexts—and, secondly, in recognition of its narrative and symbolic potency, as an anecdote. By suggesting that the film acts as an anecdote, the ambition is to reflect upon this particular narrative's ambivalent and intriguing position as a form of historical storytelling. As Malina Stefanovska (2009) elaborates, the anecdote presents both an opportunity and a threat to the study of history:

> An anecdote—defined here as a short, and sometimes humorous account of a true, interesting, if minor event—is the matrix of any (hi)story telling and the very substance of historiography. Yet this fertile soil was also often seen as the threatening substratum from which historiography had to extract itself. After all, anecdotes are associated with rumor, legend, lack or rigor or evidence, a fascination with singularity and with aesthetic form, lawlessness, contamination with fiction, and subjectivity. (16)

The anecdote—a short, often humorous tale that may present an explicit moral economy—is therefore not an uncomplicated or transparent mode of storytelling. Indeed, as I hope to demonstrate, concealed within the overt narrative and symbolic associations expressed within *The Chief's Half Day* are various layers of meaning, including a representational code that aligns children and animals. This alliance exposes the way that children, while apparently center stage, were routinely marginalized and disenfranchised within the representation of civic and philanthropic culture of the late twentieth century. The visibility of this code is, in part, due to film's "awkward-ness" and its nonprofessional status.

Summary: *The Chief's Half Day*

Directed by a stalwart of the Edinburgh amateur cine club, William S. Dobson, this film, like many of the amateur films held at the Scottish Screen Archive (and other film archives nationally and internationally), should not be confused

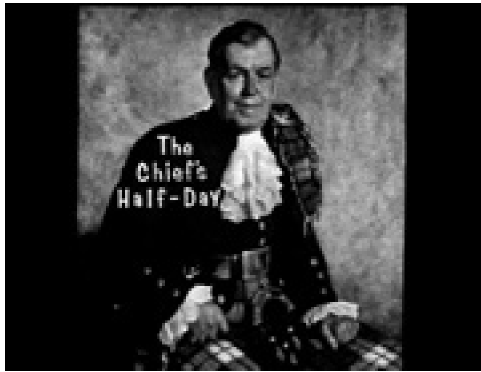

FIGURE 8.1 *Portrait of Chief Inspector William Merrilees, serving as the title card for the film* The Chief's Half Day. *Screenshot.*

with a home movie.[1] The circumstances and making of this film are evidently not domestic and it reveals a carefully edited and scripted narrative that is in opposition to the generally more ad hoc events and family-based content of the home movie. However, due to its limited duration, eccentric content and the inclusion of several sequences that are poorly focused in terms of their image quality, it is evident that it is not a commercial or professional production.

The film begins with a title card, "The Chief's Half Day," which then features a painted portrait of a gentleman in a kilt: this, we must presume, is the "Chief" of the title.[2]

The next image presents a big red book, an album of photographs evidently taken at the filming of an episode of the television series *This Is Your Life* (1955–64). The title page of the album presents as the program's subject: "Chief Constable William Merrilees OBE." Remaining close up on the book,

FIGURE 8.2 *Photograph taken on the set of the BBC program* This Is Your Life *featuring Chief Inspector William Merrilees OBE. Screenshot.*

a hand comes into the frame to turn the pages, revealing two photographs. The first shows Merrilees holding a young toddler, standing and smiling next to the program's host Eamonn Andrews.

The second photograph, which presumably must have been taken earlier, records Merrilees greeting the same toddler (with his or her mother) on the set of the program, framed against an incongruous painted backdrop of a tropical island. The film then cuts to Merrilees in his police uniform, apparently in his office, writing in his diary. As he leaves his desk, his diary entry is filmed in closeup, listing almost all of the forthcoming events to be seen in the film: "Visit to Fiona and Joey; Write to Walt Disney with reference to gift of dog Greyfriars Bobby to Children's Home; Raeburn for dinner." After retiring to another room to change his clothes from his uniform to his kilt, Merrilees returns to his office and the camera pulls back and pans up and down his body to reveal the detail and extent of his full Highland dress, thus underlining his Scottishness and establishing a visual rhyme with, or reminder of, the initial painted portrait. The film then cuts to an exterior scene at what is recognizably Edinburgh Zoo. Here, Merrilees meets and greets a penguin at first outside and then inside the penguins' enclosure. This is quite an extensive scene (running for at least two minutes) and, as Merrilees enthusiastically waves his hands at the penguin, it can be clearly seen that he has lost the tops of four of his fingers on his left hand. This generates the impression—as the man and penguin seemingly engage in a kind of conversation or dance—that they act as a mirror for one another: Merilees's injury means that his hand appears rather like the penguin's stunted wings or flippers. It then cuts to an interior scene, as he visits a baby chimpanzee (which is dressed in a diaper and knitted cardigan) at what appears to be someone's domestic residence. After an extended scene during which Merrilees pets and kisses the chimpanzee, and allows it to play with his shoes, there is another cut,

FIGURE 8.3 *The baby chimp, "Joey," plays with the Chief Inspector's shoelaces. Screenshot.*

whereupon (possibly) the same penguin from the earlier scene enters the living room in which Merrilees, the chimpanzee and its female carer are seated (although small continuity errors indicate that this scene must have been filmed at another time).

Finally, the film concludes with another exterior scene during which Merrilees apparently donates a dog to a home for disabled children. The dog has a strong visual similarity to the dog performer in the contemporary (1961) Disney version of the well-known and iconically Scottish Greyfriars Bobby legend, and the home itself is identified in the archive catalog as Challenger Lodge in Edinburgh. Here, Merrilees meets and kisses several of the children and carries a little girl with calipers. The dog, after much petting and stroking by a small group of both able-bodied and disabled children, is taken by a uniformed matron into the Lodge itself. The final sequence intercuts some of the children facing the camera waving goodbye as the Chief, also waving, walks down the driveway and out of the grounds of the house, and the end titles flash up.

Thus rather sketchily summarized, the film appears—superficially at least—comprehensible, if from today's perspective rather odd. Yet, unlike many amateur films where it may be impossible to identify people and places pictured, this film does offer one obvious route through which identities could be established. The inclusion of a contemporary television program suggests that the protagonist of the film, the "Chief"—or Merrilees—must have been well known. Like many television programs from the late 1950s, the specific episode which features Merrilees from *This Is Your Life* is no longer extant, but the script is held in the BBC's archives at Caversham.[3]

The film as artifact

Siegfried Kracauer (1969) is generally understood to have introduced a conceptual approach similar to microhistory in his final volume, *History: The Last Things Before the Last*. Here he explicitly aligns, as both practice and metaphor, the operations of the film-as-form and of the "small-scale" history:

> Such interpretative small-scale histories may be called "close-ups" because of their resemblance to the film shots of this name which isolate and magnify some visual detail—a face, a piece of furniture—to familiarize us with its particular physiognomy. (105–6)

The "small-scale" history thus pays attention to detail, to patterns of form, indeed to the physiognomy of the world presented. Yet while the origins of a

microhistorical approach can be traced to the late writings of Kracauer, it is more recently and more often defined by the innovative work of the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg. Underpinning his methodology is the "clue," which, as Matti Peltonen (2001) has suggested, means

> starting an investigation from something that does not quite fit, something odd that needs to be explained. This peculiar event is taken as a sign of a larger, but hidden or unknown, structure. (349)

In line with a microhistorical approach, an interrogation of the film as artifact starts with the detail and visual evidence within the film, identifying and contextualizing the individuals and places it captures. As an analog-based moving-image form, the film is first read in terms of the apparent content—the semantics—of its images. So, what can be discovered? Chief Inspector William Merrilees (1898–1984) or "Wee Willie Merrilees" was once "Scotland's most famous policeman."[4] At an early age, Merrilees apparently excelled at boxing and swimming; however, as is evident in the film, he lost the tops of four fingers of one hand in an accident in a rope factory. During his career in the police, Merrilees worked primarily in vice and his first major case was his participation in the break-up of a call-girl operation—known at the time as the "Kosmo Dance Club Scandal"—during which he employed what became a favorite tactic: dressing up or working in disguise (in this instance, as a woman).[5] According to his autobiography, *The Short Arm of the Law* (1966), during the Second World War he was involved in the capture of German spies (again employing a disguise—this time as a railway porter) at Waverley station in Edinburgh.

The evidence further suggests that, as implied in the film, he did indeed know Walt Disney—partly through his activities with the Church of Scotland and related international evangelical campaigns. It therefore seems reasonable to presume that the dog in the film played "Greyfriars Bobby" in the Disney film. Given his interest in dressing up and performance, as well as his participation in the world of amateur filmmaking, it is perhaps not surprising that he appears in a number of other films in the Scottish Screen Archive.

Yet the film, despite its evident materiality, is not a straightforward indexical record of Merrilees and his activities. It has evidently been carefully scripted and edited and presents individuals and events seen in a particular way. This, of course, is true of any documentary or fiction film that refers to specific historical or social events. However, *The Chief's Half Day*, like other amateur films, is different not simply because its origins are obscure but because it obeys some filmic conventions, disregards others, mixes fact and fiction, and is both willfully idiosyncratic and rigorously banal (see Mörner 2001). The amateur status of this film, despite its construction as a documentary

or newsreel of sorts, reflects an unusual proximity to the actual events and people it pictures. This film is therefore informed by the amateur filmmaker's apparent intimacy with his subject and thus demonstrates—to a greater degree than professional films—accidental or contingent elements (continuity errors, unexpected looks at the camera, unpolished performances).

For example, despite the mostly benign and colorful activities presented in the film, in his autobiography Merrilees also details other events that had great significance for him, including his direct involvement in violent confrontations with young men during the period of so-called "Teddy Boy" riots in the 1950s, and his orchestration and participation in the violent clampdown on the sexual activities of gay men in Edinburgh in the early 1960s.[6] These biographical fragments suggest a public figure that was more complicated than the animal-loving eccentric we are presented with in the film. Equally, while Merrilees is obviously the main subject of the film, he is not the only individual captured here for posterity. What if the focus of this study of the film as artifact moved from human agents and turned instead to nonhuman animals? For instance, is it possible to identify the adopted baby chimp? The Zoo's current website identified one chimpanzee, Ricky (1961–2011) who was, until his recent death, the oldest of the current group of chimpanzees at Edinburgh Zoo. However, he could not have been the little chimp in the film, not only because the film's chimp is called Joey but also because Ricky's biography suggests that he spent his first five years as a ship's mascot. By searching other films in the archive—such as *Zoo Year* (dir. Henry Cooper, 1965)—it is possible to identify young chimps of about the same age as Joey would have been, drinking milk at the chimps' tea party (a practice continued at the Zoo until the late 1960s). Yet, examining the film without expert knowledge of simian development makes it difficult to identify with confidence any of the chimps involved. Here then, for the ordinary researcher, the limits of a straightforward, semantic approach are reached. Whereas it is possible for a nonspecialist researcher to identify several later and earlier images of Merrilees in different films held in the archive—as one middle-aged white male adult in different groups of other similar, white middle-aged male adults—the identification of chimpanzees is not so easy. This lack of expertise on the researcher's part is not normally understood to be a problem and perhaps seems a rather ridiculous concern.

However, it becomes more pertinent if we reflect upon the fact that the identification of any of the human children involved in the film proves equally problematic. As has been noted by other researchers, there is a scarcity of data as to the population, the identity and the experiences of the children in many Scottish children's homes, particularly "voluntary" homes such as Challenger Lodge that were not directly under council control (Shaw 2007, 80). This is further complicated by the fact that the Lodge did not primarily

house orphans, but had a number of relatively short-term residencies, as many of the children were sent to the home to recover from operations, or to provide temporary respite for their parents.

The film as anecdote

Chief Inspector William Merrilees was an exceptional and now largely forgotten figure. Revealing and authenticating his story unearths a (his)tory worth telling and the film itself thereby becomes a valuable artifact. However, aside from its evident limitations as a biopic and/or historical document (the film cannot and does not adequately provide an understanding of either Merrilees's personality or even the identity of other individuals in the film), *The Chief's Half Day* represents its protagonist by drawing on a specific ideology that is expressed through a number of familiar symbolic motifs. Thus, aside from the initial signaling that this is a biopic—an amateur retelling and condensation of the *This Is Your Life* episode—the most obvious frame of reference on which the film deliberately draws is the classic Disney fairy tale movie. The convention of a big book of fairy tales, with a hand entering the frame to begin the story (repeated here with the album of photographs), was established as a signature scene for the Disney studio from its first feature-length animation, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), and was similarly employed in other classic Disney fairy tales such as *Cinderella* (1951). The 1950s is also the key period in which Walt Disney established his persona as an avuncular, paternalistic figure, a performance perhaps at odds with his professional role as the corporate head of a commercial and profit-seeking company.[7] As Nicholas Sammond (2005) outlines in his extensive study of the Disney myth and its relationship to childhood, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930–1955*, by the early 1950s Disney had consolidated the relationship between himself as a persona, the studio's products, and a specific and ideological "ownership" of childhood. Disney managed this through the studio's films, the newly established theme park, and his recorded introductions to the *Disneyland* television series from 1954.[8] Sammond further suggests,

> Walt Disney promised to confer upon children who consumed his products the distillation of … the behaviors and attitudes through which he incorporated the sentimental, animal, and human qualities of his childhood into the act of his perpetual commodification … Disney offered through his/its public relations the distinctly (and specifically) middle-class virtues of deferred gratification, self-denial, thrift, and perseverance naturalized as the experience of the most average American alive. (78)

The Disney "brand" embodied by Disney himself was—and is—commonly recognized as representative of a specific mode of storytelling that dominates the Western idealization of childhood. In this configuration, childhood is defined as a sacred domain where the child has rights (to be happy and to be loved) but this is realized and determined by the closely policed presumption that children are innocent, unknowing and trusting, or in other words, "empty vessels"—much like the domesticated animals with which they are frequently associated. The guardianship of this innocence is understood to be an appropriate preoccupation and a moral responsibility for adults. In Disney films, whether animation or live action (of which *Greyfriars Bobby* is a typical example), one of the ways in which these assumptions are naturalized is through the anthropomorphic presentation of animals.

These symbolic associations provide some explanation as to why *The Chief's Half Day* features so many animals. It also provides another way of contextualizing and interpreting the performance of this Chief of Police. In his close association with animals, his willingness to perform, as well as his apparent intimacy with children, the film seemingly confirms what appears to have been the contemporary popular perception of Merrilees as "Uncle Willie," thereby imitating and adapting the parallel figure of "Uncle Walt" (Disney). As in the development of Walt Disney's image as "Uncle" Walt, *The Chief's Half Day* is intended to humanize Merrilees, to emphasize his apparent kindness and generosity. This is achieved by the marginalizing of the individual children and animals that simply act as equivalent objects for his (and the viewer's) compassion and fascination.

In its representation of children and animals the film reveals much about the time in which it was made. The alliance, or paralleling, of chimp and child is established by a close focus on the little chimp's unusual gait, which is represented in a similar way to the posture and bodies of the disabled

FIGURE 8.4 *The subjects of our compassion and fascination, the children at Challenger Lodge, Edinburgh. Screenshot.*

children pictured at Challenger Lodge, such as a little girl with calipers or a little boy in a wheelchair. They are similarly and consecutively framed in closeup, held, stroked, and kissed by Merrilees and thus equally presented to the viewer as subjects for compassion and, more covertly, as picturesque, cute "beings." Referring back to *Zoo Year*, this film also provides further context for this alliance. For instance, in one sequence, several shots of human children swinging on adult human arms in an ape-like manner are cut in to scenes of what the narrator suggests are the "disappointingly polite" pongids at the chimps' tea party.[9]

In terms of its semiotic intent, then, *The Chief's Half Day* is constructed from a series of associations that are directly adapted from Disney: Where animals and children are cute, where they have instant mutual attraction, and where both readily respond to the appropriate affection of a god-like paternal figure who descends periodically with presents and kisses. The film therefore adheres to the assumption that the responsibility for, and needs of, cared-for and disabled children are akin to the responsibility for and the needs of cared-for nonhuman animals—there is, in effect, a simple correlation between the Zoo and the Children's Home. In that sense, the film's anecdotal qualities are revealing of contemporary but now anachronistic belief systems; it is unlikely that current Zoo practice would encourage or advertise the hand-rearing of an infant chimpanzee in the manner displayed here. Equally, the practice of housing disabled children in large institutional homes is also a less common practice today, at least in Scotland (see Abrams 1998; Shaw 2007). Yet what the film-as-anecdote implies is that these controversial practices and their seemingly odd alliance were at one time self-evident, unremarkable, even pleasing, in that the filmmaker appears to have determined that their close association will make for a good and attractive film that has otherwise an explicitly promotional and uncomplicatedly biographical intent. The silence of the children and animals, their lack of a "voice" in terms of supporting historical documents or context, reinforces for present-day viewers their implied and rather disturbing association in the film itself.

By way of conclusion: Another kind of anecdote

Further scrutiny unpacks another anecdote of sorts that both further complicates the persona of "Uncle Willie" and adds something to the lack of information about the children involved in the film. Embedded in the opening sequence is an image that again aligns children, animals and their adoptive carers. The first sequence includes a photograph of a woman, apparently the mother of the toddler that Merrilees greets at the conclusion of his episode of *This Is Your Life*. Without supporting biographical material

a natural assumption might be that the toddler was Merrilees's own grandchild. However, the woman and the child are not related to Merrilees: he had only one son from his first marriage and this is not his daughter-in-law. The woman was a "cared for" child, Marion Fleming, from a children's home, Dunforth House, another Church of Scotland home patronized by Merrilees and featured in another film in the archive commemorating his retirement, *Uncle Willie Merrilees* (1968). Through Merrilees's intervention, Fleming was fostered and eventually adopted by the Hollywood film star Roy Rogers and his wife Dale Evans (see Phillips 1995, 42–3). Rogers, known as the "singing cowboy," was well known for his long-lasting screen relationship with his horse Trigger, and for starring in a series of films in the 1930s and then in his own television series, *The Roy Rogers Show*, in the 1950s. Rogers and his wife met Fleming as part of an evangelical tour of Scotland and during a visit to Dunforth House, hosted by Merrilees, they were apparently charmed by the then 13-year-old Fleming's performance of "Won't You Buy My Pretty Flowers?"[10] Adoption by potential carers who were not resident in the U.K. was not permitted at the time (Stone 1955, 278 n 29), yet Merrilees was apparently instrumental in putting in place an agreement that eventually allowed Rogers and Evans to foster Fleming and she moved to the United States to live with them in 1954. In the photograph (taken five years later) from *This Is Your Life*, Fleming is introducing Merrilees to her baby daughter from her marriage to an American marine. Fleming and her husband were, at the time, stationed in Hawaii, which explains the apparent incongruity of the tropical island painted on the backdrop of the studio.

As in the episode of *This Is Your Life*, Fleming's identification perhaps provides a fitting conclusion to a chapter that relates the researcher's own "detective story." Indeed, as a "happy every after" ending, it fits seamlessly into the symbolic narrative trajectory borrowed from Disney and the fairy tale. Yet, as with other anecdotal discoveries, this story prompts more questions. According to Rogers's biography, Fleming had two brothers and a sister at the orphanage (Phillips 1995, 43). Superficial evidence on a variety of biographical websites and Fleming's original appearance on *This Is Your Life* would suggest her experiences of this unusual arrangement were satisfactory. Nonetheless, the apparent abandonment of Fleming's siblings—whether this was at the home or to other adoptive carers—is, from the perspective of today, unusual. Does this clue lead, as the film suggests, to a happy ending or does it, in retrospect, reveal something else? For while it may not discover a crime, it does seem indicative of an institutional and wider social indifference to the significance of sibling relationships for children in care at that time, as well as demonstrating a willingness to "bend the rules" in cases of fostering that involved celebrities.

In his assessment of the value of the anecdote for historians, Lionel Grossman (2003) suggests that there are at least two versions of the anecdotal form. One such form is understood as a structured narrative, which "epitomizes and confirms generally accepted views of the world, human nature, and the human condition. It may be invoked to illustrate a problem or even a paradox, but it will not usually lead to a rethinking of the terms of the problem or paradox" (167–8). To have only described and interpreted the film as an anecdote in this manner (which may have involved recognizing but not interrogating its semiotic qualities) would have determined it as a story about Merrilees and accepted, at face value, the representational codes of the biopic and the Disney film as appropriate and somehow transparent. Instead, the imperfect rendition of the then-unremarkable association between disabled children in a home and animals in a zoo exposes, to the present-day viewer, the ideological work of this alliance. In that sense, the filmmaker's unabashed, if inadequately realized, ambitions may be better understood as resulting in an alternative form of anecdote that, as Grossman (2003) suggests, obliges the investigator to react differently and to approach it as a "cipher, a mystery about which everything has to be learned" (167).

In other words, the amateur film's apparent inadequacies and its impoverished replication of professional conventions (here identified as the classic Disney film) actually provide a challenge for the film studies scholar, or the historian, who, not knowing where to start, and confronted by an artifact that is at once typical, yet equally exceptional, approaches the film less as an "open book," but rather as if it were a "crime scene" to be investigated. The analysis begins with a kind of forensics—a scientific methodology that seeks out a confirmation of what can be verified—and works up and out from the material or indexical qualities of the film. However, the film's equally significant anecdotal characteristics are more appropriately addressed through an analysis that is, in Carlo Ginzburg and Anna Davin's (1980) terms, more "elastic" in terms of its rigor, albeit still attentive to detail (28). In parallel to the uncovering of facts and further contextual evidence, this chapter has therefore provided an analysis of the film that is attentive to visual symmetry, to shared symbolic associations, to invented personae and ideologically informed alliances. By exploring the silent presence of children and animals and specifically their shared intimacy and low status, the film offers up more than one kind of history (the story of an apparently benign, if eccentric public figure) and contributes to a wider understanding of the historical and social construction of the "child" in the twentieth century. It presents an opportunity, as Grossman (2003) suggests, for a "reconsideration of what we believe we know about history and society and lead[s] us to consider previously unobserved aspects of the past" (168).

Notes

1 W. S. Dobson served as secretary for the Edinburgh Cine Club and as vice-Chairman of the Scottish Amateur Association of Cinematographers. More information can be found at the Scottish Screen Archive, http://ssa.nls.uk/

2 Further details of the portrait can be found in Cabris (2009). See also http://www.merrileesclan.org.nz/

3 The episode in which Merrilees appears was screened on the BBC on Monday November 23, 1959, Series 5, Program 13.

4 The headline is used in various sources about Merrilees, see for instance the webpage "William Merrilees OBE (1898–1984)," devoted to the *This Is Your Life* television series: http://www.bigredbook.info/william_merrilees.html

5 This is documented by Merrilees's (1966) own memoirs, which includes photographs of Merrilees dressed as a woman and is repeated in numerous newspaper obituaries printed after his death in 1984.

6 Merrilees details the campaign in his memoirs in the chapter "The Campaign against Homosexuality" (1966, 115–26). In a later chapter, "The Charge of the Teddy Boys" (167–75), Merrilees details his ongoing "battles" with Teddy Boys, culminating in the Wallyford Dance-Hall riot.

7 This familiar but honorary title of "uncle" was unsurprisingly adopted by Merrilees; in another film in the archive marking his retirement, *Uncle Willie Merrilees* (1968), he visits another children's home and is greeted by the residents as "Uncle Willie."

8 The Disneyland theme park was opened in Los Angeles in 1955; the first transmission of the *Disneyland* television series on American television was in 1954.

9 For more on the close association between children and chimpanzees see Shuttleworth (2010).

10 The film *Uncle Willie Merrilees* features Dunforth House.

9

Starring Sally Peshlakai: Rewriting the Script for Tad Nichols's 1939 *Navajo Rug Weaving*

Janna Jones

Introduction

The library cart next to me is stacked with video transfers of amateur films. I am looking for films that might be candidates for a film preservation grant: footage that is pleasing to the eye and culturally significant to the Colorado Plateau region. After several satisfying hours of watching dusty cows and mule deer, black-and-white cactus flowers, and 1950s cars on bumpy roads, I start watching Tad Nichols's 1939 *Navajo Rug Weaving*. I am immediately struck by the vivid Kodachrome color of a Native American woman's rust-colored blouse. Shearing a sheep, she works unselfconsciously, neither glancing at the camera nor avoiding it. On her knees, she works deftly, barely looking at the sheep or her sharp shears. In the next scene, the camera focuses on a Native man in a faded blue shirt and a well-made cowboy hat. For 12 seconds, he watches the sheep, the women and children around him. Sitting back in a wooden chair, his arms crossed, he looks casually at the camera, and then nonchalantly looks away.

The film chronicles the Navajo rug-weaving process, and it does so systematically. Brief intertitles explain the processes of shearing, wool dyeing, spinning and weaving. The film offers no information about the weaver, her family or where the film was made, but sometimes the camera counters

FIGURE 9.1 *Clyde Peshlakai observing the sheep shearing process. Screenshot.*

the film's instructional tone with a knowingness that suggests an intimacy between the filmmaker and his subjects, as the weaver and her family are unperturbed by the camera. Its dramatic Kodachrome colors, skilled cinematography, and relevance to northern Arizona make it an excellent candidate for a National Film Preservation Foundation grant.

I pull the VHS transfer out of the VCR, wondering how to define what I have just viewed. My best guess is that it is an amateur movie that aspires to be an educational film because the single credit lists Tad Nichols as the producer. Its systematic explanation of the weaving process—from shearing sheep to unthreading the rug from the loom—and Nichols's straightforward instructional intertitles are meant to inform non-Native audiences about Navajo culture. Nichols, a white filmmaker who lists only himself in the credits, does not name the film's subjects nor does he identify where they live. I realize that it is not a stretch to classify it as an ethnographic film, a film genre with a troubled past.

During the first half of the twentieth century some white filmmakers (educators, scientists, anthropologists, explorers, and tourists) filmed non-western people in ways that contemporary culture understands to be ethnocentric and racist. Such ethnographic filmmakers, Amy Staples (2002) explains, were "the early pioneers in the representation and commodification of performative primitives, forging the tourist circuits, networks, and exchange relations in which global cultures are now thoroughly mediated" (53). Many ethnographic films from this period serve as vivid evidence of the arrogance

of the imperial gaze, as they depict non-western people as primitives living in a static culture, frozen in a preindustrial time. Yet Nichols's familiarity with his subjects belies some of the impulses of this kind of ethnocentric filmmaking; the intertitles cannot contain the vitality and confidence of the weaver and her family. The lingering and carefully framed shots of the red and cindered landscape, the gentle domestic scenes with small children, and the weaver's comfort with the camera do not align with the film's educational format. I am excited that I have "discovered" *Navajo Rug Weaving* because pre–Second World War moving images of Navajos are quite rare, but as I shelve it on the library cart, I am also unsettled. I am going to recommend for preservation a 1939 film about a Navajo family that seems to be wholly constructed by a white, male filmmaker who likely did not even live near the weaver's stark homeland.

Film preservation is a costly, time-consuming, and political process. Few archives are able to preserve more than a few films a year and, as a result, most films in archival collections have not been preserved nor are they accessible to the public. Selecting *Navajo Rug Weaving* for preservation means that Nichols's film will likely be circulated, exhibited, and even celebrated within the public sphere, but it also means that another deserving film in the collection will not be preserved and will remain essentially hidden. As I explain in *The Past is a Moving Picture: Preserving the Twentieth Century on Film* (J. Jones 2012):

> Careful attention is paid to moving image documents that are already culturally constructed as historically relevant. Such materials are readily accessible to researchers, making it fairly easy for researchers to work with materials. Their investigations add more to the biographies of well considered moving image materials, helping to further develop and maintain their cultural significance. As a result, the informational imbalance with the archive perpetuates itself. Matter that is already deemed important circulates easily—helping to reify its meaning. Material that lacks identification tends to remain a mystery. (124)

Due to the fact that Nichols meticulously maintained his films, photographs, correspondence, and records during his lifetime, and then donated his vast collection to Northern Arizona University's Special Collections before his death, I was able to uncover extensive information about him, his wife Mary Jane, the weaver Sally Peshlakai, and her husband Clyde. In the months that followed my first encounter with *Navajo Rug Weaving*, my uneasiness about the film diminished, as the wealth of contextual information enabled me to piece together the film's entire biography—its conception, production, and postproduction. I came to understand it as a film deserving of preservation

because visually it positively represents the Peshlakais' autonomy and domesticity. While *Navajo Rug Weaving*'s textual components erase the Peshlakais as individuals and contributors to the film, I realized that I could revise its cultural script, making it a meaningful and relevant film for contemporary audiences.

While it would be impossible to revise the meanings of all archival amateur films that objectify Indigenous peoples, some can circulate meaningfully in contemporary culture if their biographies are uncovered and interpreted and their cultural scripts are revised in ways that transform the objectified into well-developed historical subjects. Such contextual recovery, interpretive work and revision is important for the early-twentieth-century moving-image record because Native Americans typically did not have access to moving image cameras until the 1960s, the period when cameras became less expensive and more accessible. Fortunately, for the last 50 years, Native Americans have been increasingly able to represent their own lives on film, video, and television, incorporating, as Michelle Raheja (2010) explains, "both Indigenous traditions of community representation and non-Indigenous filmmaking practices" (199).

The making of *Navajo Rug Weaving*

As I began my research on Tad Nichols, I quickly discovered that when he was filming Sally Peshlakai in Wupatki, he was no "stranger with a camera." The Navajos were not an exotic culture to him, and Wupatki, the area outside of Flagstaff where *Navajo Rug Weaving* was filmed, was not a foreign place. He shot the footage for *Navajo Rug Weaving* two years after his 1937 graduation from the University of Arizona's Department of Archaeology. During his undergraduate work, he was part of the first permanently based archaeological field school in Arizona. Nichols was also introduced to other parts of northern Arizona, including visits with Hopis in their villages and Navajos who lived scattered through the region. Nichols was trained by, worked with, and was influenced by, two of the most important names in twentieth-century American Southwest archaeology: Byron Cummings and Emil Haury.

In 1939, the year he shot the footage for *Navajo Rug Weaving*, Nichols was employed at the Bureau of Audiovisual Services at the University of Arizona. As part of his position at the university, Nichols took photographs of the university's excavation sites, using a 16mm camera. Nichols had a sustained interest in filming the Southwest region and Native cultures, and his passion for the region continued long after he finished *Navajo Rug Weaving*. He also produced, among others, the amateur films *Navajo Home Life* and *Apache*

Indian Camp Life Among the White Mountain Apaches in Arizona in 1940, and, *Yaqui Easter Celebration*, a film about Pascua Yaqui ceremony, in 1941–42. In the mid-1940s, he became a professional filmmaker, making educational films for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, including *Trail to Health* (F. C. Clark, 1947), a film made at the Albuquerque Indian Sanitarium that used Native actors to explain daily life at a sanitarium.

Nichols became a cinematographer for Disney in the 1950s. His work there included the cinematography for the film *The Living Desert* (James Algar), which won an Oscar for Best Documentary in 1953 and was added to the United States National Film Registry in 2000. Nichols did not work for Disney long, as he found much of his work there a sham: most of *The Living Desert*, he explained to friends, was filmed on artificial dunes built on a vast sound-stage table. The writer Kenneth Brower (1998) remembers that Nichols and the nature photographer Alan Root "affected a sad cynicism about the unseemly things they were called upon to do, but underneath, clearly was a grifter's glee at various con jobs well executed—and under *that,* if I am not mistaken was a soupçon of genuine shame" (93; emphasis in original).

Nichols and his wife Mary Jane lived in Tucson, Arizona, but they spent much of their leisure time in Wupatki in the late 1930s with their close friends, Courtney and Davy Jones. A trained archaeologist who also had a degree from the University of Arizona, Davy Jones was the official custodian of the Wupatki National Monument. The federal government established the monument in 1924, in order to protect the archaeological remains of the Sinagua people who had occupied Wupatki in the 1100s. Employed by the National Park Service, Jones and his wife moved to Wupatki in 1938, one year before Nichols filmed *Navajo Rug Weaving*. When the Nichols visited the Joneses they stayed in a tent, for the Joneses had no extra space in their two fairly modernized rooms built inside of an 800-year-old sandstone slab ruin.

The subjects of *Navajo Rug Weaving*, Sally and Clyde Peshlakai, were not strangers to Nichols, as they were the Joneses' closest neighbors. In the book *Letters from Wupatki*, a compilation of Courtney Jones's (1995) personal letters, Jones describes their relationship with the Peshlakais:

> Clyde was really the mainstay of our life at Wupatki. He was sort of the head Navajo, although I don't think he was much older than his brothers. We saw those people a lot, almost daily. They helped us in any way that a neighbor would. And we helped them as we could. Clyde's older wife, Sarah—or Sally, as we called her—was well … there's hardly a word to describe her. She is a distinguished person, and whenever there was a Sing, or ceremony, that required a woman to be a role model for a young person, she was the one chosen. I always thought she was a big, tall

> matron. The strange thing is I found out she was tiny. She was shorter than I was. I still can't believe it—she was larger than life and always will be. (xx)

The Peshlakais are a well-known and well-regarded Navajo family. Clyde's father, Peshlakai Etsid, settled in the Wupatki area in about 1870, following the Navajos's five years of exile. Clyde's father was one of the first Navajos to learn the craft of silversmithing, and was greatly respected by both the Navajos and the whites for his justice and wisdom. He traveled to Washington and met with President Theodore Roosevelt during the land use disputes of 1902 and 1904. Clyde and Sally were also well regarded in the northern Arizona region. They were friends with the founders of the Museum of Northern Arizona, Harold S. Colton, and his wife Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton. Dedicated to preserving the history and cultures of northern Arizona, the Coltons sought out Clyde and Sally for their knowledge of Native history, artifacts, and crafts. Clyde Peshlakai was the unofficial custodian of Wupatki. While the National Park Service employed custodians to manage the monument, Peshlakai viewed government officials as people "who were sent there to do the paperwork and intervene with the government and take care of the details like that while he did everything else" (C. Jones 1995, xx). When brave travelers in the 1930s and 1940s drove the one and a half hours of unpaved roads from Flagstaff, finally arriving at the Wupatki National Monument, they were just as likely to have been welcomed by Clyde as by Davy. Sally, well regarded for her skillful sewing and weaving, taught Courtney Jones how to weave. In a letter dated July 1939, Courtney described the rug she was weaving with the help of Sally and her sisters:

> My rug is about four inches high now—I just wish I could go down to the hogan every day, but so far have managed only three trips. [The Peshlakais] are living about a mile away, and Sally and I have looms over the branches above to augment the shade … They are very patient with me and I am beginning to understand what is going on—they weave so fast that one has no idea how many little processes they must go through to weave one thread. (C. Jones 1995, 12)

Nichols and his wife Mary Jane spent enough time with the Joneses at Wupatki that they were able to develop their own relationship with the Peshlakais. In *Letters from Wupatki*, there is an August 1938 photograph of Sally weaving a rug at the Peshlakai summer camp. The photo is attributed to Nichols, suggesting that he not only developed an interest in Sally's craft and talent, but also that he had become friendly or at least familiar with Sally an entire year before he shot *Navajo Rug Weaving* (C. Jones 1995, 13). During the month of June 1939, when Nichols shot *Navajo Rug Weaving*, his wife

Mary Jane wrote letters to her parents in Kansas City detailing their extended stay at Wupatki. In some of her letters she describes trips that they took with the Peshlakais. In one letter, Mary Jane Nichols (1939b) wrote about their trip to a rodeo: "With directions from Clyde, we parked [at the rodeo] between wagons with Navajos all around … Clyde told Tad to start taking pictures for the wind was going to come up soon. I stayed in the car while various Navajos piled in and out. Finally we came home. I got out before Tad took them to their camp. Sally reached out and patted me. They are such nice people."

As I combed through Nichols's 20 boxes of correspondence, my most exciting discoveries were Mary Jane's letters to her family in Kansas City. A doctor's daughter, she bravely left the security of the Midwest to finish her college degree at the University of Arizona in 1931. An archaeology major, she met Nichols at the university; they began dating in 1934, and were married soon after they graduated in 1937. Mary Jane was a bird watcher, a Pi Beta Phi, an adventurer, and a gracious and compassionate young woman. Her letters provided rich and compelling details about her experiences at Wupatki the summer her husband filmed *Navajo Rug Weaving.* In fact, it was her letters that helped me to identify Sally Peshlakai and her family. In contrast, her husband never mentions the Peshlakais by name in any of his correspondence about the film. In a letter she wrote to her family about the filming of *Navajo Rug Weaving*, she carefully describes one of the blouses Sally wears in the film: "When we got back to the camp Sally was dressing up for the pictures … She came out in a lovely purple velveteen blouse. There were 12 dimes on each sleeve and 25 turquoise and silver buttons on her

FIGURE 9.2 *Sally Peshlakai and her young assistant. Screenshot.*

collar. A necklace brooch and three rings added to the costume. She looked so pretty with her hair combed and clean" (1939a).

Nichols also explains the construction of the *Navajo Rug Weaving* set. Davy Jones, Tad Nichols and Clyde Peshlakai built a ramada with an adjustable room to increase the light. They hung a sheet down to reflect the sunlight, but it was a good sheet and Courtney Jones did not want it ruined: "It was Sally who figured out how to hold it. With wool rope she had spun she tied the corners of the top and fastened the bottom to a log. There wasn't enough rope but Katherine [Sally's stepsister and Clyde's other wife] spoke up and said she was making more. Sure enough, in two minutes, there was a stout piece of rope all made! So we took pictures. Sally still gets rather a gloomy expression when she bears the camera." In the same letter, Nichols also explains how Sally had meticulously prepared for the wool-dyeing scene. After they were finished shooting for the day, Nichols writes, "[i]nside the hogan, we could hear Clyde singing. When we went in we found him holding the baby, which was strapped to a cradleboard. They just worship it" (1939b).

Arguing that problematic (early-twentieth-century) ethnographic films should not necessarily be dismissed, Michelle Raheja (2010) explains that if researchers are able to uncover and acknowledge the ways that indigenous peoples contributed to the making of older films, then the films can be revisited with "a narrative that privileges Indigenous participation and knowledge production in films that are otherwise understood as purely Western products as *Nanook* and Edward Curtis's *In the Land of the Headhunters* (1914) have been" (196). In every way, the Peshlakais were instrumental in the making of Nichols's film. Unfortunately, once the Nichols finished making the film, the contributions of the Peshlakais became invisible.

"Those Navajos" in postproduction

Following the filming of *Navajo Rug Weaving*, both of the Nichols presented the Peshlakais to the public as if they were exotics rather than their best friends' neighbors and collaborators on the film. It is likely that Mary Jane Nichols felt pressure from the editors of *The Desert Magazine* (1937–85) to write about Wupatki as if it were a foreign land and the Peshlakais as if they were exotic strangers. In 1940, Nichols published an article about the Joneses titled "They Live in an Ancient Ruin." While her husband's photographs of the Joneses accompany the article, no photos of the Peshlakais are included. The article's introductory blurb states that the Joneses "haul their drinking water five miles, get their mail but three times a week and their only neighbors are Navajo Indians—but their compensation for these inconveniences is the romance of living in the oldest inhabited dwelling in the United States" (11).

While the introductory blurb suggests the Peshlakais are an inconvenience, in the article, Jones explains that the Peshlakais are the Joneses' neighbors and "interesting and likeable" friends: "To Corky and Davy the Indian is no longer an uncultured, poker-faced curiosity. They have learned that the Navajo have a fine sense of humor" (14).

Nichols's exoticization of the Peshlakais in *The Desert Magazine* certainly runs counter to the way she speaks of them in her personal letters, but she does, at least, name the Peshlakais, and she also explains that Sally and her step-sister, Katherine, are helping Courtney to weave a rug: "In her little apartment, Corky has a loom which Clyde's wife, Sally, helped her erect. Learning to weave rugs as the Navajo do is not a simple operation. But when she gets into difficulty Corky goes to the Navajo camp for expert advice" (Nichols 1940, 14). We know that the Peshlakais were deeply involved in the production of *Navajo Rug Weaving*, based on the content of Mary Jane's letters. Sally selected what she wore on set; she also meticulously prepared the wool-dyeing scene and was the set's troubleshooter. Her husband helped build the ramada and cared for the children while Sally performed for the camera. Yet, Tad Nichols's regard for the Peshlakais was not evident once the filming was complete. Nichols lists no one but himself in the film's credits, and when he discussed the film with critics, potential distributors, and audiences he never mentioned the Peshlakais or Wupatki by name. For example, in a letter to a Mrs. Brown, who had made an inquiry about renting *Navajo Rug Weaving*, Nichols explains that he found it interesting to work with "the Navajos," and that if they are treated with respect, "they will do almost anything for you" (T. Nichols 1943). In postproduction, Nichols transformed the identities of Sally and her family into "the Navajos," erasing their individual identities.

For six years Nichols distributed and exhibited *Navajo Rug Weaving* in amateur and educational film circles. Nichols distributed it to schools, exhibited it at museums, and in 1945 submitted it to the Amateur Cinema League competition, winning a prize for one of the "ten best" films of the year. Nichols finished shooting *Navajo Rug Weaving* by the end of June 1939, and after he returned to Tucson, he began editing the film and seeking feedback about it from a variety of amateur film experts. Members of the Hollywood Motion Picture Forum (a "teacher-reviewing" group based in Hollywood) watched and discussed Nichols's film in July 1940. The secretary of the Forum explained to Nichols, in a detailed letter, that the audience believed that his film "was the finest motion picture on American Indians that the group had ever seen and the photography ranked among the best that had ever been viewed" (Evans 1940). Comments about how Nichols might finish the film were also included. Warren Scott, a professor of cinematography at the University of Southern California, suggested that Nichols add

intertitles to the film if it was to remain silent; or add a soundtrack with a running commentary, such as the "conventional classroom sound films"; or show it with "a background of music based on American Indian scenes" if no intertitles or sound were present (Evans 1940). Indeed, *Navajo Rug Weaving*'s initial lack of intertitles seemed to bother many of the film's reviewers. While Nichols's film would win the Amateur Cinema League's "ten best" award in 1945, the League's view of it in 1940 was far less enthusiastic. Laurence Gritchell wrote to Nichols explaining that the Amateur Cinema League's main objection to the film was its lack of clarity: "May I, off the record, … make a suggestion that struck us all during the viewing? Your film badly needs commentary of some kind, either by titles or by the spoken word. It does not, in its present form, teach adequately" (Gritchell 1940). Kenneth Miller, at the Museum of the American Indian, also lamented the lack of intertitles, but wrote that from "an ethnographic point of view they record contemporary Navahos faithfully and may justly be classed as outstanding films" (Miller n. d.).

Nichols must have seen the writing on the wall, finally adding terse intertitles to the film prior to submitting it to the Amateur Cinema League's competition in 1945. When I discover the reviewers' letters critiquing Nichols's film, my negative judgment of the film's educational tone lessens somewhat. I understand that Nichols's initial *Navajo Rug Weaving* was more artistic and impressionistic than his final version. I appreciate that Nichols wanted his audiences simply to take in the beauty of the Wupatki landscape, the domestic scene of the Peshlakai summer camp, and Sally's deftness at the loom. But his critics wanted *Navajo Rug Weaving* to educate and because Nichols had ambition for the film, he relented; the film's new educational tone was rewarded with the coveted Amateur Cinema League prize ("The Ten Best and the Maxim Memorial Award" 1945, 495).

Nichols also wrote a script to accompany the exhibition of *Navajo Rug Weaving*. Sometimes Nichols read the script when he was present for the film's screening at museums, such as the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago or the Heard Museum in Phoenix. Like the intertitles that he later added, the script makes no mention of the Peshlakais or Wupatki. While the text is quite specific about the weaving process, Sally is nameless and placeless, seemingly suspended in time. At the end of the film, when Sally's beautiful rug is ready to be taken off the loom, the script simply explains: "The weaver unthreads the rug from the top loom pole. The finished rug falls off the loom. Working intermittently the weaver finishes this rug in seven days" (T. Nichols 1940). While Nichols had high regard for Clyde Peshlakai, the text that accompanies the 12-second scene of him does not suggest that he even knew him. "Navajo man sits, watching his wife work!" the script exclaims. "Women do most of the work, but the men often help with sheep dipping

and clipping." Nichols, in his ambition, must have believed his audiences would be more interested in *Navajo Rug Weaving* if he characterized the Peshlakais as exotic Others, rather than his friends and collaborators on the film. His success exhibiting and distributing his amateur film during the early 1940s suggests his instinct was right.

While Nichols's script transformed the Peshlakais into nameless Navajos, his moving images carefully and thoughtfully depict Sally's artful weaving and her family's joyful domesticity. In the same year Nichols was filming an intimate portrait of the Peshlakai family, John Ford was shooting *Stagecoach* (1939) in Monument Valley, only 150 miles from Wupatki. Ford's film depicts Apaches as savage warriors and obstacles to American expansion and progress, a portrayal of Native Americans that was both fictional and disparaging. While Nichols's cultural script for the film is also flawed, it represents the near realities of the Peshlakai family's daily lives. *Navajo Rug Weaving* offered 1940s museum and educational audiences images of Native Americans that competed with and challenged Hollywood portrayals of Native Americans. Audiences who sought out both educational and fictional films likely found both kinds of representations pleasurable, integrating the competing portrayals of Native Americans into their understanding of Native life.

Rewriting the script of *Navajo Rug Weaving*

One of the only moving-image records known of the Navajo rug weaving process prior to the Second World War, the National Film Preservation Foundation awarded Northern Arizona's Special Collections a preservation grant for *Navajo Rug Weaving* in 2009. The film's restoration enhanced the intensity of the Kodachrome color, bringing an added richness to the beauty of Sally's lovely garments, her turquoise jewelry and the Wupatki cindered land and cobalt blue sky.

Today, the preserved *Navajo Rug Weaving* streams online on NAU's Special Collections website and anyone with access to a computer can watch the Peshlakai family confidently go about their daily lives in Wupatki in 1939. Because *Navajo Rug Weaving* has been preserved, it is imperative to revisit its cultural script so that is not simply viewed as an old movie about the Navajos. If the film is to be a meaningful artifact in contemporary culture, it is important that viewers are able to make sense of the Peshlakais as fully developed historical subjects.

Because I have detailed the film's textual and extratextual diminishment of Sally and Clyde Peshlakai, it may seem impossible that the meanings of *Navajo Rug Weaving* can be recuperated for present-day purposes. The film's

FIGURE 9.3 *An example of Nichols's artful cinematography. Screenshot.*

textual dimensions (the intertitles, the script, and some of the film's extra-textual information) align with the troubling characteristics of ethnographic films; however, Nichols's preserved moving images do not objectify the Peshlakais. His subjects neither avert their eyes nor smile passively in the camera's direction. When Sally is stringing clean yarn around two poles to dry, she does a double take in the direction of the camera, as if she had forgotten

FIGURE 9.4 *Sally Peshlakai smiling at the camera. Screenshot.*

FIGURE 9.5 *A Peshlakai toddler practicing her carding skills. Screenshot.*

that Nichols was there. She grins slightly at him before turning her back and walking away.

Sally's stepsister is also unconcerned about Nichols's presence. Sitting near an infant strapped in a cradleboard, she works confidently and deftly carding the newly dyed wool, seemingly too busy to be bothered by the camera. When Nichols focuses his camera for nearly a minute on a toddler attempting to maneuver the wire-toothed carders that are far too large for her tiny hands, he captures not the exotic, but the nearly universal appeal of watching a child attempt grown-up labor.

Nichols's artful, colorful and compassionate moving images capture a golden time for the Peshlakai family in Wupatki. Today, only one or two of their descendants still live in the Wupatki area.

It was critical to preserve *Navajo Rug Weaving* because it artfully documents the rug weaving process, the daily life of the Peshlakai family in Wupatki in 1939, and serves as testimony to their autonomy, domesticity, and economic self-sufficiency. Nichols's beautiful moving images have been painstakingly preserved, and his film surely looks almost exactly as it did when he ran it through his movie projector in the early 1940s. Now, however, the film's original script has been radically altered and Sally Peshlakai and her family are no longer nameless and placeless Navajos captured on a white man's 16mm film.

In this chapter I have revised *Navajo Rug Weaving*'s biography and rewritten Nichols's original cultural script by revealing the Peshlakais's identities; describing who they were and explaining their relationship with Wupatki and

their social contributions to the region. I have also detailed their relationship with the filmmaker, described the Peshlakais' contributions to the making of *Navajo Rug Weaving*, and explained their subsequent discursive objectification once Nichols finished making the film. My revision of the film's narrative complements the preservation of *Navajo Rug Weaving* because both efforts aim to attract new viewers to an old film. Transforming the Peshlakais into their rightfully deserved status as fully developed historical subjects enables *Navajo Rug Weaving* to be a more culturally accessible and meaningful artifact for its viewers in the early twenty-first century. To be sure, such revisions are not always possible because many amateur films lack *Navajo Rug Weaving*'s wealth of contextual information. Still, its extensive biography helps us to map the broad cultural influences of amateur film, and it also reminds us that an amateur film's conception, production, postproduction, exhibition, and distribution have as much to tell us about our past as the film itself.

PART THREE

Nonfictional Recontextualizations

10

Change of Scale: Home Movies as Microhistory in Documentary Films

Efrén Cuevas

In the last two decades, a significant number of documentary filmmakers have used home movies to create films that can be termed "historical," insofar as they use domestic footage to provide portrayals of past times and societies. These documentaries are not built around grand historical events, but around the quotidian episodes of the different families portrayed, and thus suggest a way of looking at the social fabric that is close to the sociological studies of everyday life and analogous to the historiographical approaches of studying "history from below," used by the Italian *microstoria* or the German *Alltagsgeschichte*. In this chapter, I intend to analyze those links, first by examining why home movies are a valuable source for a sociological study of everyday life and/or a history from below. Then, I will focus on how documentaries made out of home movies enter into dialog with those approaches, and examine to what extent they can be understood as the filmic equivalent of the microhistorical studies written by professional historians. In order to achieve this, I will analyze the two basic types of structures of these films: the collective chronicles composed from a wide collection of domestic footage; and the films that focus on a single family, whether autobiographical or not.

Home movies as documents for a history of everyday life

The growing interest in home movies within academia has not yet brought to the forefront the connection with related fields such as everyday life studies or microhistory. Scholars from these fields rarely focus on home movies as sources of their analysis, and while film scholars have paid some attention to them, there is still much ground to cover.[1] The essays included in *Mining the Home Movie* (Ishizuka and Zimmermann 2011) probably constitute the main effort in this direction, although they are rather more focused on archival issues and standard historical approaches. Patricia Zimmermann (2011), in her introductory chapter to that collection, addresses these questions more clearly. When considering the role of home movies in history, she stresses how recent research examines their hermeneutic possibilities, looking at how they "can function as a recorder, an interrogator, a deferral, a condensation, and a mediator of historical traumas that extend beyond the self, such as labor, war, race, gender, religion, illness, diaspora, and displacement" (5). She also suggests that when this domestic footage is used in contemporary media productions, it is conceptualized "as microgeographies and microhistories of minoritized and often invisible cultures that are social and highly political"(18).

Home movies therefore need to be conceptualized as more than just an interesting visual archive for standard historical accounts, which complements other traditional sources. It is also necessary that they be understood as the most suitable filmic document to study "history from below" as proposed by microhistorical approaches. With important scholars in the Mediterranean area—such as the Italians Carlo Ginzburg and Giovanni Levi and the French Jacques Revel—microhistory takes a change of the scale of observation as its main premise. Historians employing this approach posit that the grand narratives of traditional history do not capture the real significance of the times and the people. Instead, microhistorical approaches ask for a new scale, which will produce a new type of historical knowledge because, as Revel (1996) states, "varying the focal length of the lens is not simply about enlarging (or shrinking) the size of the object caught in the viewfinder: it's about altering its shape and framing ... it's actually changing the very content of what is being represented (in other words, the decision about what is actually representable)" (19; translation by Barry Monahan). Such an approach also reacts against the more deterministic or functionalist historiography, prevalent until the 1970s (the French *Annales*, the North American cliometrics, the Marxist approaches); and against the *longue durée* structures linked to these trends. Instead, microhistorians "affirm the human agency of past men and women

at every level of society, but always within a specific, concrete network of social relationships" (Gregory 1999, 103). The microhistorical framework fits quite appropriately with the approach found in home moviemaking, always centering on individuals and families, with a continuous focus on the small scale of their environments.

The very nature of home movies also concords with the concept of the miniature, outlined by Alf Ludtke (1995) in his explanation of the basics of a history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*), to stress again the small scale, where "the 'density' of life situations and contexts of action can be made vivid and palpable" (21).[2] Ludtke proposes creating a collage or mosaic with those miniatures to form societal "patchwork" structures, linking them together in a network of interrelations. In doing so, he addresses one of the main problems of these approaches: how to apply the knowledge acquired with the micro scale to the larger historical frameworks (14). This is what Francesca Trivellato (2011) also addresses in her study of the links between micro-, macro-, and global histories. She finds these scales relate to each other best within the narrative framework proposed by microhistorians, with an emphasis on biographical studies, since the study of individuals with global microhistories may bridge the gap between the different scales. Home movies do not fit into this pattern directly, since they lack a narrative framework and are rather undecipherable for anyone outside of the circle of family members. Providing a narrative structure for the general public will be the task of contemporary filmmakers when recycling domestic footage in order to compose filmic microhistorical canvases, as we will study in this chapter.

Collective portraits

To begin with, we will focus on the case of filmmakers using home movies to build collective portraits of a generation or a minority. Some of these films can qualify as compilation films, usually made for television and sometimes mixing professional, amateur and home movies. Here we will examine three cases that go beyond the standard compilation documentary and that show distinctive ways of recycling home movies: *Private Chronicles. Monologue* (*Liner Nahimov*, Russia, 1999); *Memory of Overseas Territories* (*Mémoire d'outremer*, France, 1997); and *Something Strong Within* (U.S.A., 1994).[3]

Private Chronicles. Monologue offers a portrait of Russian society from the 1960s to the 1980s, exclusively using home movies from that period. Arranging them by years (from 1961–86), filmmaker Vitaly Manskij selects them from a vast collection and applies a fictional framework: the pretend autobiography of a Russian—speaking in voiceover—born in 1961. Manskij stresses the hybrid nature of the film by placing his fictional protagonist

within a solid historical frame. This is achieved by beginning and ending each chapter with a caption specifying the year, accompanied by a photograph, frequently of protagonists of the public history of that period. The overall result is not completely satisfying because Manskij often seems to look for an all-too-perfect match between image and voiceover, dismantling the naïve truth-value character of the home movies, and foregrounding the ready-made dimension of the format. Despite this weakness, the image track offers a rather surprising portrait of the Russian society of that time, far different from the stereotypes of the Soviet Regime that western spectators most likely had: celebrations, dinners, dancing, vacations in seaside resorts, and so on, all shot by domestic filmmakers using small-gauge cameras, a commodity typically associated with capitalist societies. Nonetheless, these "private moments" are still intermingled with the filming of events usually associated with the official public image of the regime, such as the typical Soviet military parades.

This film therefore represents an interesting example of how the change of scale provides new insights in the portrayal of a generation, one that leaves aside the stereotypes of the mainstream media. Likewise, it shows how home movies reflect the understanding of everyday life suggested by Michel de Certeau (1984): as a site of resistance against the standardization promoted by the institutional powers. This resistance—a mixture of given inertias and inventive deviations—is to be found, according to de Certeau, in how "popular procedures (also 'miniscule' and quotidian) manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them" (xiv). In this context, home movies can clearly qualify as one of the "the innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production," therefore bringing to light "the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline'" (xiv–xv). In *Private Chronicles. Monologue*, the scenes of everyday life show little of the orthodoxy appropriate to an official Marxist state. Instead, they resemble scenes familiar from westernized societies, with their citizens' attachment to habits of leisure and consumerism. They also show a certain clash between private and public spaces, linking the celebration of parties and dancing to private homes, in contrast to the official celebrations (with military parades as their prototype) that occupy the public sphere.

The storyline provided by the fictional protagonist does not hinder the film from offering a rather sketchy representation of the Russian society of that time. The very nature of home movies, with filming open to random situations and with no professional planning, nurtures this image; their gathering in a single film fostering the collage effect. This outcome in fact reinforces the representation of "everydayness," which comes to life in its fullest, according

to Ben Highmore (2002), when it is characterized by an improvised quality (24–6). Highmore proposes Impressionist painting as exemplary of this approach, but the same argument can be applied to home movies, because they also combine subject matter and form to capture that unscripted and sketchy condition of the everyday. Home movies do not intend, obviously, to offer a systematic study of everyday life, because they usually avoid the grim aspects of family life. Yet despite their partiality, they truly succeed in showing the everyday life in a way no other visual format, either fiction or documentary, has managed.

These issues are also visible in the French film *Memory of Overseas Territories*, which deals with the life of French colonizers from the 1920s to the 1960s. Filmmaker Claude Bossion makes his film using home movies shot by people living in the colonies, mixing scenes from different countries and appearing to keep a chronological order (although many of them are not explicitly dated). The soundtrack, nevertheless, reinforces the collage effect of the overall film since it employs very different verbal sources (often unrelated to the images): official reports, encyclopedia entries, personal and official letters, interviews to some of the actual home moviemakers or to the people filmed, etc. The combination of visual and verbal sources from different times and places creates a polyphonic text that looks for resonance beyond the standard watching of home movies, foregrounding that sketchy and unscripted condition mentioned by Highmore as a key feature in the representation of everydayness.

This portrait of the colonizers intends to offer new insights into the history of colonization, not so much related to the macrohistorial framework (although some of the verbal sources give context or commentary in this sense), but rather to the history of their everyday life, thus coming closer to the approach of Alf Ludtke and other microhistorians. With this approach in mind, it seems inevitable that a nostalgic mood for a bygone way of life becomes a part of the fabric of the film. However, this nostalgic component does not imply a justification of the problems linked to colonization, as Rachael Langford (2005) seems to argue, since the film does not intend to offer a standard macro-historical explanation or to examine its well-known sociopolitical conflicts. Langford laments the absence of "images of political meetings, demonstrations, bombings, or police actions," which, according to her, makes the film present colonialism not "as a struggle, but as a consensual project" (107), and as "a private affair" (108). Her interpretation, however, seems to forget the nature of the visual material used in the film, a misunderstanding that can be seen also in her classification of the images as "amateur films" and never as home movies. While some scholars consider home movies as a type of amateur filmmaking, there are important differences between them (taking both modes in a strict sense). These discrepancies are relevant to this

context: amateur filmmakers aim to make films—fiction or documentary—that are to be shown in public and thus emulate professional standards (including the editing); on the other hand, home moviemakers mainly shoot their daily activities or events happening in their surroundings, to be shown just in family gatherings.[4] Therefore, when Claude Bossion decides to make a film out of home movies, the material itself determines the nature of his film, which will look at colonization from a microhistorical approach. Its portrait of everyday life cannot be considered false or fictional, as Langford describes it (108), because it speaks about the colonization from a different perspective, through the ordinary situations shown by the home movies. It is through this domestic footage that the spectator learns about the social and working differences between the French colonizers and the African people, thus revealing the quotidian consequences of colonization.

Something Strong Within also deals with historical contrasts in its representation of the everyday life of the Japanese-American community incarcerated in camps in the U.S. during the Second World War. The events have been depicted in fiction and documentary films in the last decades, with *Something Strong Within* standing out as one of the most poignant portraits. Filmmakers Robert Nakamura and Karen Ishizuka used footage shot by people imprisoned in the camps, and added music composed by Dan Kuramoto, an introductory text, and several quotations throughout the film, as well as the photographs and names of the home moviemakers. The collective portrait provided by this film becomes a very interesting example of the potential of home movies as historical documents, since it focuses on a well-known historical event, now seen through a microhistorical lens. It clearly becomes an alternative narrative of those events, in contrast to the official newsreels that attempted to offer a rationale of the forced internment, reflecting, as Ishizuka (2010) states, "the dialectics of a community reinventing itself within a uniquely colonized socio-political environment of containment" (216).[5] The home movies depict many of the usual routines of family life, but here with the ominous background of tar-paper barracks and guard towers. They also incorporate other scenes not so typical of home moviemaking, such as views of the empty landscapes around the camps, or communal activities (meals, games, etc.). The capturing of such images shows a level of self awareness on the part of the home moviemakers; a recognition of the historical importance of keeping some visual trace of these events. This example of "history from below" also depicts the everyday life of the community as a clear act of resistance, this time in the face of enduring circumstances, as Robert Rosen (2007) explains: "They resisted the inclination to lose hope in the face of daunting challenges … to deny a cultural identity and community solidarity that had singled them out for persecution in the first place, and, most surprising of all, to abandon their commitment to a nation that had abandoned them" (120). This last

paradox is explicitly visualized in the film in one of the most surprising scenes: the visit of a sergeant, who was fighting in the 442nd Infantry Regiment, which was composed entirely of Japanese-American volunteers. The genuine celebration of his visit—and very existence of his regiment—conveys the puzzled multicultural identity of this community: proud to be American and eager to show it at a time when the system was openly challenging their Americanness. It is this that is so central to *Something Strong Within*, a film that encapsulates so effectively the efforts of Nakamura and Ishizuka to bring back to public attention the history of this community and its struggles in the face of such a historical hardship.[6]

Microhistorical family narratives

Besides these collective portraits, we can find a significant number of films that use home movies to compose personal and family portraits deeply embedded in their historical contexts. These films offer a closer proximity to the best-known examples of Italian *microstoria*, since these historians usually propose an in-depth study of an individual or a family as the route through which a historical period can be understood. As Edward Muir (1991) explains, "to the microhistorians the makers of history are seldom 'great men' but rather the little peoples lost to European history" (x). They trace the lives of individuals, resulting in "a prosopography from below in which the relationships, decisions, restraints, and freedoms faced by real people in actual situations would emerge" (ix–x). They also employ a narrative approach in their research because it can better show, as Giovanni Levi (2001) suggests, "the true functioning of certain aspects of society which could be distorted by generalization and quantitative formalization" (105–6). This approach clearly resonates in the films of Péter Forgács, but also in other less-known films such as *Y in Vyvorg* (Finland, 2005), *For My Children* (Israel, 2002) or *I for India* (UK, 2005).[7]

Both *Y in Vyvorg* and many of Forgács's films cover events from the 1930s and 1940s, and are concerned with the war conflicts of those times. *Y in Vyvorg* focuses on the Ypyä family from 1939 to 1949. Residents of Vyvorg, the wife and the children had to leave the city when the Soviet Union tried to invade the country. Remarkably, both husband and wife kept making home movies during those years of separation. Filmmaker Pia Andell reconstructs this period using their home movies and letters, moving away from a standard historical documentary and instead offering an account of the war through the experiences of this family. Her film shows the contrasts during these years: the times of peace and the times of war; life in the home front and life in Vyvorg. She adds a new dimension by using the family letters, which openly narrate

the hardships of war and separation, adding new overtones to the domestic images of happy children or daily routines. A basic historical framework is provided through a voiceover fictionally assigned to two of the daughters. Yet the strength of *Y in Vyvorg* does not rely on its historical data, but on its microhistorical portrayal of the war, as lived by the Ypyä family. This approach clearly echoes the goal pointed out by Giovanni Levi (2001) for microhistorians: "their work has always centered on the search for a more realistic description of human behavior, employing an action and conflict model of man's behavior in the world which recognizes his—relative—freedom beyond, though not outside, the constraints of prescriptive and oppressive normative systems" (94). It is difficult to imagine a more oppressive setting than a war period, and the film succeeds precisely in portraying the struggles of the Ypyä family within this setting, using for its purpose domestic footage, a fitting visual source for the small-scale research intended by Pia Andell.

Péter Forgács applies a similar approach in all his films, often focused on the history of a single family: Dusi and Jenő in the film of the same title (1989); György Pető and Eva in *Free Fall* (1996); the Peerebooms in *The Maelstrom* (1997); Joan Salvans and Ernesto Díaz Noriega in *The Black Dog* (*El perro negro*, 2004); and Lisl Goldarbeiter and her cousin Marci in *Miss Universe 1929* (2006).[8] Forgács thus maintains the microhistorical perspective as a distinctive feature of his work, looking at complex historical periods of the last century through the lens of individual lives. Nevertheless, he does not try to approach his films as a professional historian, but as a filmmaker. His thorough documentation and detailed editing of the footage is complemented with other expressive techniques, such as tinting and toning, freeze framing, slow motion, and the distinctive music of Tibor Szmezö; all of them amplifying the meaning of the images, striving for a balance between a historical account and an emotional portrait of the period.

Among Forgács's work, probably one of the most discussed films is *The Maelstrom*.[9] Here he approaches the Holocaust from the perspective of a Jewish Dutch family, the Peerembooms, using their home movies as the main visual source. Forgács shows a strong historical consciousness in his approach, skillfully connecting the small scale with the general historical framework. To achieve this, he complements the domestic footage of the Peerembooms with titles that supply factual information about the legal persecution of the Jewish people in Holland, and sound recordings of public speeches of that time. Achieving a neat balance between the macro and the micro, he reinforces the historical dimension by the inclusion of the home movies of Seyss-Inquart (the Reich Commissioner for the Netherlands) and his family. The interplay between the two domestic sources creates a powerful and poignant contrast and complicates viewers' responses. The home-movie style calls for a sympathetic answer from the public, but our

FIGURE 10.1 The Maelstrom. *Screenshot.*

historical knowledge keeps us from a benevolent reception of the Seyss-Inquart family footage, and thus provokes an ambivalent reaction in us. On the other hand, the stylistic and subject matter similarities between the two domestic sources reinforce the latent tragedy of the Jewish family. Watching their ordinary routines, the spectator develops a strong sense of anxiety, since the protagonists show such a tragic ignorance of the real threads of their time, as we can see particularly in the images of their naïve preparations to travel to Auschwitz. *The Maelstrom* presents itself as a masterful piece of microhistorical research into a historical period well known to the spectator, one that succeeds in creating a deeper understanding of the historical era.

Many filmmakers have used home movies of their own families to create family portraits with strong historical echoes, adding an autobiographical perspective to the recycling of the domestic footage. In some cases, these films present a structure similar to the compilation film, and their tone comes closer to a visual study of the everyday life of a particular society, such as *The Paternal Line* (*La línea paterna*, México, 1994) or *The Artificial Horizon* (*El horizonte artificial*, Spain, 2007). In other cases, the home movies give way to films more embedded in historical contexts, such as *I for India* or *For My Children*. Both films employ diverse visual sources, with home movies

standing out among them. In Michal Aviad's *For My Children* the home movies are used sparingly, but they are blended with Aviad's specific filming of her family for this project. Nevertheless, the goal of the film goes beyond the limits of her family, delving into the history of Israel to understand what its future will be and thus producing a remarkable work about the intermingling of micro- and macrohistories. Paraphrasing the microhistorical theses of Giovanni Levi (2001), Aviad gains access to a knowledge of the past with an approach that "takes the particular as its starting point … and proceeds to identify its meaning in the light of its own specific context" (106). This approach is not seen as a coherent system: instead, it makes its contradictions visible, "the fragmentation … and plurality of viewpoints which make all systems fluid and open" (107). *For My Children* offers a version of the history of Israel that includes the contradictions of the system, expressed by the members of the family.

The film also provides a good example of how the study of an individual case can be the best way to understand the general framework, as Levi (2001) says, "since minimal facts and individual cases can serve to reveal more general phenomena" (109). Aviad stresses the connection between her autobiographical account and the macrohistorical context by employing different strategies: the typical use of public archival footage; the inclusion of present public events as seen in the television news; and, most importantly, the testimonies of her family (grandparents, husband, brother-in-law) as the guides to remember and re-evaluate the history of Israel. Her film therefore offers a rich dialog between family history and public history, becoming a powerful case of a chronicle of everyday life embedded in public events.

In *I for India* filmmaker Sandhya Suri employs the correspondence composed of home movies and audiotapes sent between her father and her relatives in India, beginning in 1965 when he immigrated to England with his wife and children to work as a doctor. In the first part of the film, Suri recycles all of this material, mixing home footage and audio recordings that were originally recorded separately. The happy nature of the domestic images takes on a new meaning once it is complemented by the audio recordings, creating a bittersweet effect in which the sadness of separation predominates.[10] The second part of the film shows the return of Suri's family to India in 1982, a stay that was unsuccessful and caused them to come back to England again. Interestingly, during their years in India her father hardly shot any home movies, as if they only made sense as a way of keeping the family together when they were far away. This is a revealing sign of the role domestic communication technologies—films, videos, and ultimately the Internet—play in this film, as a crucial way of maintaining the communal identity of the diasporic family. It demonstrates the primary role of home movies—as Odin (1995c) points out—in strengthening the family group, providing a mythical

FIGURE 10.2 I for India. *2006 © Sandhya Suri.*

anchor that protects it from the contingencies of time and the tests to which it is subjected by the world (32–3). This function is even more present in transnational families like Sandhya Suri's, since the home movies work here as an umbilical cord that keeps the family bonds alive despite the distance that separates them. Moreover, the home movies of Suri's father also provide what Lebow (2012b) calls "reverse ethnography" (225), a look at the British society from the vantage point of an Indian "ethnographer," expanding their meaning beyond the family circle to become a valuable social record of this period in England.

As a whole, *I for India* becomes a powerful film about the processes of immigration, seen again through the microhistorical lens of a particular group. It becomes the point of access to the contemporary problems of transnational families, those "families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely 'familyhood', even across national borders" (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002, 3). Besides the small scale of observation, the film's chronological structure—which gives it a loose narrative cadence—also places it close to the methods of micro-historians, and away from macro approaches and their inability to show the inconsistencies of the system and the tensions experienced by individuals. *I for India* succeeds in portraying these tensions that come from the physical separation and cultural contrasts. Nevertheless, the film also manages to

place these struggles in broader frameworks, through different strategies such as the contrast between the domestic footage and the public archives (as in a scene showing an excerpt from the BBC about Indian immigration in the 1960s), addressing the determination of microhistory to make the small scale meaningful for the understanding of the macrohistorical contexts.

Home movies stand out, therefore, as a valuable source for the generation of a filmic version of the "history from below" that has been cultivated in the historiography of the last decades. When recycled in contemporary documentaries, they provide a clear change of scale, offering new perspectives that enlighten well-known periods like the Second World War, or bring to the fore minorities and events marginalized by the public history or the mainstream media. Filmmakers recycle this domestic footage to make collective portraits of a generation or a minority, or to analyze historical periods through the perspective of a single family or individual, in tune with the concerns of microhistory. In all the cases, from Forgács to Andell, Aviad or Suri, they succeed in placing the narratives of these families in broader frameworks, providing the spectator with a deeper understanding of past times.

Notes

1 I addressed these issues in Cuevas (2007). This chapter develops some of the main ideas outlined in that article, improved and complemented with new references and films.

2 It exceeds the scope of this chapter to examine the differences between microhistory and *Alltagsgeschichte*, or among practitioners of microhistory. For an introductory comparative analysis, see Gregory (1999) and Trivellato (2011).

3 Since most of the titles are little known, I provide information here about availability for purchase. *Liner Nahimov* is not available for sale; *Mémoire d'outremer* is available at www.circuit-court.org; *Something Strong Within*, at www.janm.org

4 Nevertheless, the differences between amateur and home moviemaking are not always clear-cut, depending on the situations portrayed or the purpose of the shooting. In the case of *Memory of Overseas Territories* there are sequences that come closer to a standard amateur film, like the harvesting scenes in "la région de Souk El Khemis," or the one showing the "Mission Ophtalmologique Saharienne." But most of the sequences fit more properly with home moviemaking, in following the activities of their filmmakers' families, like weddings, First Holy Communions, hunting excursions, etc.

5 The quotation comes from the original English version of the chapter—available on www.efrencuevas.com—published in Spanish in Cuevas (2010).

6 The efforts of Nakamura and Ishizuka go beyond the making of this film, and are visible in their work at the Japanese American National Museum.

One of their most remarkable successes was the inclusion of the film *Topaz* (edited by home moviemaker Dave Tatsuno with material he shot at this camp) in the U.S. National Film Registry, the second nonprofessional film included after the Zapruder film. See Ishizuka and Zimmermann (2011, 126–41).

7 Forgács's films have not been released on commercial DVD, with the exception of *Hunky Blues: The American Dream*. *Y in Vyvorg* can be ordered from the production company Of Course My Films; *For My Children* is for sale on www.third-ear.com; *I for India* is available commercially.

8 Although it is not my ambition here to make an exhaustive study of documentaries made with this approach, it is worthwhile to mention another documentary series, somehow close to the scope and goals of Forgács's films: *Private Century*. Made by Jan Šikl for Czech television, using home movies from the 1920s to the 1960s, it is composed of eight 52-minute episodes.

9 Besides the numerous references to the film in other analyses of Forgács's films, *The Maelstrom* has been studied specifically by Renov (2002), Roth (2008), and Hagedoorn (2009). The articles of Renov and Roth are also available in Nichols and Renov (2011). In addition, two new essays on Forgács's work, by Ruth Balint and Richard Kilborn, are printed in this collection.

10 For a broader study of the different uses and values of home movies in autobiographical works, see Cuevas (2013).

11

Creating Historiography: Alan Gilsenan's Formal Reframing of Amateur Archival Footage in *Home Movie Nights*

Barry Monahan

Ratcheted, in stills,
how thin and brown the smooth-limbed
brothers, throwing off their casts of sand (Bury me! I am a dead man!)
framed in loose rolls of celluloid, and I, smaller even than the buried
ones up there on our sitting-room wall.

Sara Berkeley, from *Home Movie Nights*[1]

As he sets the scene for his description of the enthusiasm with which Ireland of the mid-1990s embraced the burgeoning economic Celtic Tiger, Fintan O'Toole (2010) notes how the country's relationship with the past had become riven with questions of uncertainty and hesitation. He directly addresses Catholicism and nationalism, which he calls the "twin towers of southern Irish identity," (3) and argues that the monolithic institution (the former) and the historical discourse (the latter) were both, by 1995, undergoing a certain deconstruction. "Institutional Catholicism began to lose its grip in the 1960s; by the early 1990s its foundations were already undermined by secularisation, the sexual revolution and its own scandals. Nationalism had become vastly more complicated, a set of troubling questions rather than of easy answers" (3). At a time when the nation state's compulsion was towards an interrogation and re-examination of ideological and political "givens" that had been deeply and—unquestioningly—embedded in the Irish psyche and

its culture, it was perhaps apposite that the work of Alan Gilsenan, an Irish documentary filmmaker, would result in a project that inherently interrogated our relationship with our public and private pasts; the means by which we recreate images and narratives of history and memory; and the very volatility by which historiographies are managed through contemporary personal and political narratives.

Gilsenan was no stranger to filmmaking, and had already completed a number of successfully received short films in the 1980s and early 1990s. He produced his first documentary film, *The Road to God Knows Where*, in 1988, and in this portrayal of the lives of contemporary 20-somethings in Ireland, he displayed a masterful management of the formal codes and conventions of the documentary genre. It is this recognition and manipulation of formal qualities of the medium that he would revisit with measured aesthetic address in the series *Home Movie Nights.* The latter television project contains programs that position clips of old home-movie footage in juxtaposition with filmed contemporary interviews given by relatives of the amateur filmmakers.

Home Movie Nights takes its name from a poetry anthology by Sara Berkeley in which she nostalgically reminisced on her memories of home-movie projections from her youth. The collection of 26 programs was made by Gilsenan's production company Yellow Asylum Films for Radio Telefís Éireann between 1996 and 1998, and was first aired by the state broadcaster in 1998.[2] The intertextual reference to Berkeley's formally inventive and self-reflexive collection of poetry fittingly emphasizes Gilsenan's interest in exploring how the formal construction of the programs deliberately reframes compilations of amateur home-movie footage. Just as Berkeley's poems play experimentally with formal qualities of her language, and display an awareness of the processes of her mediation of memory by the spoken word, so too do Gilsenan's programs recontextualize collections of home-movie clips retrieved from the Irish Film Archive, or provided directly by benefactors to the production company. Each episode uses an uncomplicated talking-head format, where contemporary interviews with the filmmakers (or one of their relatives) are intercut with home-movie clips. In each case, the featured contributor provides voiceover commentary on the images, and intertitles introduce sections of film clips offering basic descriptions of the events depicted, or the location and period of their recording. The format of the programs is straightforward, and recognizable codes, conventions and registers of the documentary interview structure are employed. In every program, after the credit sequence, an opening title card provides basic biographical information on the interviewees; intertitles establish consecutive chapters of home-movie footage; and aural cues combine voiceover commentary with musical interludes and sound effects, dubbed over silent

footage. Ultimately, the template applied by Gilsenan across the series of programs invites a reading of the reframing of amateur and home-movie footage by audiences in ways that have already benefitted academic historiography, as Patricia Zimmermann (2007) has noted, "in its trajectory from official history to the more variegated and multiple practices of popular memory, a concretization of memory into artifacts that can be remobilized, recontextualized, and reanimated" (1).

Notwithstanding the minimalist design of this construction, the apparent structural simplicity of the programs belies the complexity of meaning construction. The intricacy of the hermeneutic possibility open to audiences occurs as Gilsenan relocates amateur footage from archive and private holdings, and historiographically repositions it within the new televisual configuration. He invites spectators to reflect upon these historical reconstructions, a part of his design that is marked most obviously by the reference to the title of the poetry collection noted above, but also by Gilsenan's positioning of the filmed footage in a frame within the frame of the television screen. By drawing attention to the construction of the programs in this way, by emphasizing the deliberate reconstitution of meaning through his framing of the older footage—even if the significance of the intertextual reference to Berkeley's collection goes unnoticed—Gilsenan invites possible contemplation on his modus operandi to the television spectator. In this short chapter, I want to examine three particular methods by which Gilsenan allows complementary and contrasting televisual registers to encourage reconsideration of the construction of the history represented, the reconstitution of the past by memory, and the role of home-movie footage in this production, as well as inviting audience reflection on his creation of an historiographical moment. While I will only be making reference to a handful of episodes from the series, the examples used are broadly representative of recurring tropes employed throughout the catalog of programs.

Harmonious matching

Occasionally, rather than allow image and vocal tracks to work against each other, thereby interrogating the accuracy or legitimacy of the interviewees' commentaries on the past, or their recollections of it, Gilsenan establishes a seamless and (all too) perfectly matched combination of aural and visual tracks. In such cases, the confluences and convergences of dialectically positioned registers, somewhat counterintuitively serve to undermine the construction of the past by the subject's memory by intimating that the amateur images have been responsible for the *creation of memory*. This occurs a number of times throughout the series when voiceover observations by interviewees

accord in a particularly perfect way with the images presented. There are several examples of subjects reflecting upon details that they remember lucidly relating to banalities such as clothing they were wearing on a given day, or a toy or other prop which they had with them at a certain event, or on other characters who were present in a given location. Furthermore, significantly, these commentaries are punctuated with phrases like "I remember that so well" and sentences beginning with "You remember how it was…"; expressions demonstrably offering personal reflection on the constructed nature of memory and the volatility of recollection. While not impossible that specific details may have become a part of the memories of the participants, the extent to which the accounts are minutely accurate might reasonably lead the spectator to question the provenance of the recollections (sometimes involving perspectives, points of view, and angles that could only have been provided by the mediating camera). The cinematic apparatus is no longer merely an innocent and detached bystander, but is complicit in the provision of interviewed subjects' constructed memory of the events that have been captured and, one can reasonably assume, has been reviewed on a number of occasions by them.

One of the more prescient pieces of footage, commented upon by Conal O'Beirne who worked for a number of years at Shannon airport and so came into contact with visiting celebrities across his career, was one depicting the visit of Pope John Paul II to Ireland in 1979. Shots of the pontiff on the red carpet on the runway at Shannon show him surrounded by Irish cardinals and bishops, including Bishop Eamon Casey.[3] The footage firstly shows the two men embracing, before it replays the shots of Casey in extreme slow motion, with the voiceover commentary by O'Beirne adding: "You can see him giving a great special hug to Bishop Casey because I think he stayed in his house in Galway … when he was in Galway … At the time, everything was normal … what appeared to be normal so … We're all human." It is clear from the concatenation of image and commentating voiceover, that O'Beirne's memories have been informed and refreshed, in time, by repeated reviewing of the footage, so that his naturally presented observations are in near-perfect sync with the filmed images. His memories of the event have not only been confirmed and registered by the footage filmed, but they have also been formed and recreated by it. Retrospectively, the meaning, significance and historical consequence of the experiences of that afternoon have been shaped by his revisiting of its filming.

Conflicting registers

At other times, a dialectical relationship established by Gilsenan between audio and visual registers demands of audiences a reconsideration of the construction of historical meaning. This has one of two consequences for how the material is received. On the one hand, it is possible to interpret political affiliation or sympathies that Gilsenan might have felt towards his interviewees. This might be gauged on the basis of how the contemporary voiceover commentaries come to inform the film footage that we are shown. In the program featuring Christabel Bielenberg, for example, over shots of children playing in the family garden on a summer's day, she states: "Well, one of the things … which I find a little frightening today, is that everything is money." While this comment accords well with similar expressions of nostalgic reflection on the "simple good old days" by interviewees contributing to other programs, in the current context—where clearly those represented in the amateur Bielenberg footage are shown to be materially comfortably off—the statement takes on ideological significance emerging from the suggestion created by the juxtaposition of image and voiceover. Later in the same episode, Mrs Bielenberg speaks of her son's receiving a PhD in Agriculture at Trinity College, Dublin, and how he played "rugger" with the university team, as we are shown footage of an academic graduation procession and shots of a rugby match. The ostensible ideological neutrality of Gilsenan's position might be questioned when, in the course of another episode, his sympathetic depiction of Edward Condell has him talking of sporting activities, specifically mentioning the—nationally significant—Gaelic Athletic Association, and confessing: "I don't think we had a rugby club here; we had hurling, boys' football, adult football." The decision to include this slight aside definitively places Condell's commentary—specifically against that of Bielenberg—as one of an "insider"; more closely associated with a "Gaelic" perspective where the GAA games were more direcly connected to his cultural heritage than the more "rugger" reference that distances Bielenberg from that cultural background.

On the other hand, discrepancies and divergences between juxtaposed tracks might simply mark the historiographical construction that Gilsenan has so meticulously exposed through a variety of framing devices—often using shots from footage of frames (windows, doors, and so on) within frames—and offering self-conscious consideration of the footage by individual participants. This is done frequently near the end of each episode when interviewed subjects are invited to reflect upon the value of the home-movie footage and on the nostalgia that the recordings evoke. When images do not fit perfectly with the voiceover commentary, Gilsenan invokes questions

about the reliability of memory and the qualities of nostalgic contemplation. A commentary by Desmond Leslie in his program is placed over images of agricultural work in autumn fields that could be reminiscent of Éamon de Valera's idealized Ireland of the 1940s and 1950s. His voiceover discusses his father's significant role in Irish history: "He learned Irish. And he saved de Valera's life because he was on the commission in America to try and bring England (America) into the First World War … and they were going to shoot de Valera, remember? He was on the list. But he was an American citizen and father said: 'Look, if you shoot him, America won't come into the war.' So they didn't shoot him." The marriage of his voiceover and the idyllic autumnal scenes of agricultural labor invites an interrogation on the extent to which certain historical revisionism might be entering the narrated biography. The historical knowledge of spectators would invite a more nuanced reading of the events of de Valera's eventual pardon after he received the death penalty with other Irish rebels who orchestrated and fought in the Easter Rising of 1916. This aspect of the voiceover narration, in combination with a viewing of the romanticized images simultaneously presented, are likely to summon a probing interrogation of the veracity of the vocal description that accompanies the footage.

Deferral of hermeneutic closure

Perhaps the most intricate manifestation of the recreated nature of memory and history occurs when there is *no clear indication* given as to the extent to which image and soundtracks coincide or disconnect. At these points interpretation of meaning goes beyond the documentary text, and explicitly invites audiences' reflection on their interpretation of the material in a very obvious way. This happens when what is manifest on two combined tracks does not create an easy fit for either the contemporary voiceover or the home-movie images. This is something that becomes all the more significant for a contemporary viewer. With the first two examples given in the earlier sections above, there is either (a) the coherent establishment of meaning by the matching of sound and image tracks, or (b) a mismatching of the tracks with conflicting information on acoustic and visual registers. In this third possibility, different, juxtaposed tracks can neither be interpreted in harmony nor in conflict as there is no clear way of determining how the registers of information relate to one another.

The most remarkable example of this occurs in John Crawford's program, when his voiceover commentary is juxtaposed with otherwise unremarkable footage of three semi-naked boys playing a game in which they try to remove beach towels wrapped around each other's waists. The game is innocently

overlooked by two gentlemen sitting in deckchairs, in front of a seaside caravan where the family has evidently been spending a summer vacation. As the boys struggle to pull the beach towels off each other, the camera pans and tilts to keep them in shot. The cavorting has all of the hallmarks of a typical family scene of young boys playing, but the scene takes on significance beyond the immediate implications when matched with the audio commentary. With no ostensible thematic connection immediately obvious, and no clear one inferred, the dramatic juxtaposition invites alternative spectator reflection based on the combination of sound and image. This brings about a situation where the interpretation of meaning cannot reside in, or emerge from, either of the tracks. Instead, it is deliberately forced from a dialectical amalgamation of both sources of information. On the voiceover recording that accompanies the images, Crawford says: "I think in every family, there's going to be the undercurrent problems. I don't think our family was any different. There were problems from time to time … but I think, looking back, the good times outweigh the bad times, the difficulties." This statement is disconnected from the previous lines of voiceover commentary, and its mention of the notion of a problematic family past—marked by the use of the words "problems" and "difficulties"—is unmotivated by anything already shown in the footage. In fact, as the monolog continues, the word "problems" is repeated until, in a somewhat awkwardly expressed resolution, the subject matter of Crawford's concern is revealed to be his anxiety about being a parent in a society dealing with the increasing crisis of drug abuse. His commentary continues hesitantly: "I think for young people now, perhaps times are different. I don't think it was any better … Perhaps there were the same problems within society … though perhaps we're hearing more these days that the problems were there though they were hidden. I suppose the one problem that I face as a parent with children is the ever increasing problem with drugs."

In the light of recent (although not unprecedented) contemporary revelations—in mid-1990s' Ireland—about abuse perpetrated against children by members of the Catholic clergy, it was the concealment of the brutalities that became as inflammatory as the violations themselves. With references to the contemporary media reporting on these disclosures dotted throughout *Home Movie Nights,* it is noteworthy that in the light of Crawford's mention of certain problems being "hidden," he goes on to forefront the "ever increasing problem with drugs." Gilsenan's political intention in creating this juxtaposition is necessarily obscured by his desire not to provide hermeneutic clues for the spectator, but his aesthetic and ideological purpose is to frame dramatically the historiographical construction and invite contemplation on the ways in which memory, autobiographical reflection and history are assembled. It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which Gilsenan has embarked upon

the exposure of any historical injustices from this series alone, but the way in which these programs have been structured strongly suggests that his willingness to invite a healthy disrespect for the casual—and hegemonically closed—way in which we accept official historical accounts is tantamount in his aesthetic and ideological project.

Conclusion: The archive reactivated

Increasingly, as this collection of essays attests, global audiences are coming into contact with amateur and home-movie footage beyond the walls of the film and video archives to which they were once bequeathed and consigned. Now, finding alternative places of exhibition—as installation pieces, parts of multimedia displays, or at specialized festivals—they are reframed by different texts and contexts. These diverse framing devices bear ideological resonances, and have political ramifications, for the ways in which we construct public and private memories and histories, and for the ways in which filmmakers mobilize amateur footage as historiographical performances. However, these ideological resonances and political ramifications are not always immediately obvious, and our experience of reframed and recontextualized home movies may appear to arrive with the same ideological purity with which they once appeared available to us for private viewing and research back in the archive. As Zimmermann (2007) attests, much academic writing in the field of amateur films and home movies celebrates the potency of these artifacts to summon alternative readings of, and engagements with, official "top down" histories. Like these projects, Gilsenan's *Home Movie Nights* series succeeds in its attempt to "mobilize these images into a dialogical relationship with history, moving them out of the realm of inert evidence into a more dynamic relationship to provide historical explanation" (5). In its formal recognition of the conflict between competing or complementary registers, across its codes and conventions, Alan Gilsenan's *Home Movie Nights* series visibly dramatizes the ideological functions at play in the historical representation and application of amateur home footage.

Notes

1 *Home Movie Nights*, by Sara Berkeley, was published in 1995 by New Island Books, one year before Gilsenan's series went into production.

2 Initially just over half this number of programs was produced, but when the first run ended in July 1998, calls were put out in search of volunteers

to donate home-movie footage with a view to producing another body of programs for Radio Telefís Éireann's autumn schedule.

3 Eamon Casey was the Bishop of Galway and Kilmacduagh who, after a revelation by his former lover Annie Murphy to Irish newspapers in 1992 that she had given birth to their son in 1974, tendered his resignation and emigrated. The "scandal" was considered to be another revelation that would contribute to the undermining of the authority of the Catholic Church in Ireland in the 1990s.

12

"That would be wrong": Errol Morris and his Use of Home Movies (as Metalanguages) in Feature Documentaries

Stefano Odorico

> And so, here's Abu Ghraib, the filmmaker [Errol Morris] continued, where you have these people actually saying these things, saying, "That would be wrong." And yet they're in the middle of this insane muddle. (Dollar 2008)

Abu Ghraib Prison, only 20 miles from Baghdad, is a notorious American institution that in 2003 "hosted" more than 8,000 Iraqis suspected of terrorism. In 2004 a number of atrocious pictures were found and shown to the public, portraying U.S. soldiers at Abu Ghraib taking part in acts of sexual abuse, deliberate humiliation, illegal interrogations, and the torture of prisoners. The Abu Ghraib case is an example of how torture, humiliation and digital photos, taken by the torturers themselves, can coexist in the same context of violence. These photos not only document the torture, but also become an integral part of it and, to an extent, determine it. The soldiers, in fact, tortured the prisoners for entertainment value and, as Morris stated, in order to derive digital pleasure from their acts:

> The pyramids had been staged in order to take photographs. In fact pretty much everything that was done to the prisoners that night [November 7, 2003], once they were naked, was done for the cameras. This made that night different from other nights on the tier. (Gourevitch and Morris 2008, 195–6)

Photographs always had a place in the tortures carried out at Abu Ghraib but, after that evening, prisoners were tortured predominantly for the purpose of producing these images. When they were released to the public, the audience was not prepared to see this kind of photographs; there was something new in them. They were perceived and received emotionally as if they were different from any other "more common" photographs of violence.

This chapter examines the audience's experience of Errol Morris's feature documentary, *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008), which is an investigation into the Abu Ghraib scandal and the images of the tortures. In particular, it will address the choice adopted by the director to incorporate home-movie clips in the documentary, in order to achieve a specific narrative and emotional strategy. According to Stella Bruzzi (2006), Morris is a director who is "obsessively preoccupied with how we (Morris and the audience in his film) look at and are shown images" (196). In order to achieve an ultimate sense of reality in his films, Morris makes significant use of reconstruction, archival footage, interviews, computer graphics, different film formats, elaborate lighting, camera set ups, still images, and, as Bruzzi writes, "an intrusive, repetitive score to create an evocative synthesis of what he considers his overall story to be" (234). Often, Morris combines materials from different sources: sequences from old fiction films, home movies, newsreels, photos, and TV commercials. Furthermore, I will examine the strategies that the director uses in order to reach his audience at both a communicative and emotional level, as well as the spectatorial experience of violence in a documentary film that shows and re-enacts images of violence. To do this, I will apply a pragmatic theoretical analysis, which mainly focuses on the figure of the spectator as an active element in the viewing process. The objective of a pragmatic theory of film is to understand how audiovisual productions function in a given social space, in what Roger Odin (1990) calls a "space of communication" created between the actant-director (at the level of production) and the actant-reader (at the level of reception) during the production of meaning (67–82). Looking at the concept of communicative structures in dialogical terms, every communicative act, independently of a specific textual typology, demands an act/pact of codes of negotiation (Hall 1980, 128–38). This negotiation in the cinematographic process of watching a film requires a further contract between the filmic text and its viewer. This contract, which is related to what Umberto Eco (1990) calls a "fictional agreement" (75), or contract between the text and its reader, has as its consequence the construction of a space of interaction, participation, and contribution. Within such a space, the surrounding context plays an important role in the realization of the contract. However, it is important to stress that this pact is not automatic, but must find support in a range of different strategies that the author can adopt in order to set up a communicative system with the audience. In other words, it is a communicative contract that is specific to the

nonfiction experience and that diverges, in various aspects and practices, from the fiction contract (Bondebjerg 1994, 66).

One of my main areas of investigation here is the notion of the contract as a sort of collaboration, a perspective that marks the position and role of the spectator, during the act of viewing, as one that is relatively active. The contract sets up a dialogical relationship between all the communicational figures and is similar to what Yuri Lotman and Yuri Civyan (1993) define as a sort of experience of dialog with the screen. The pragmatic perspective analyzes sociological involvements, meanings, texts, and contexts, as well as profilmic aspects. It accepts the existence of an authorial collaboration of the reader/spectator; of his/her coparticipation in the construction and in the interpretation of meaning and in the experience of reading/viewing. The production and reception of film are seen in this context as socially programmed practices. The spectator is subjected to institutions (cultural, social, ethical, etc.) that regulate the operations employed to achieve a satisfactory comprehension of the text.

The pragmatic approach in film studies focuses on the way in which the spectator is addressed by the film and on how the spectator's position, during the cinematic experience, is "inscribed" in the filmic text. Therefore, from this perspective, one of the main differences between fiction and nonfiction is that, when watching a documentary, the spectator must recognize the enunciator as real, as an actual extratextual entity, in order to guarantee the "truth" of the images. Very often the tension generated during the viewing of a documentary film is not just a strategy to attract consensus by the director, but is a kind of mimesis, because the spectator recognizes the reality of life in the motion pictures. A deep sense of truthfulness is thus generated. According to Odin (1990), the documentary film's mode of vision is an assembly of a process of aggregation around a compulsory practice. This compulsory practice is diegetic and consists in the construction of a real enunciator that can be interrogated in terms of truth. It is of primary importance, indeed, to note that from a pragmatic perspective a filmic text is not a documentary because it "tells the truth," but because we, the audience, interrogate it about the truth (during the diegetic process). Odin's theory recognizes a film as a documentary while the film itself refers, as suggested above, to a definite documentary mode of reading.[1] Such a mode is characterized by the activation of three different, and not independent, communicative processes within the main process of the creation of an enunciative structure: 1) construction of a real enunciator (in opposition to the fictive one); 2) the interrogation of the enunciator in terms of "truth"; 3) evaluation of the informative value of what has been shown: what did I learn about the world? In other words, it is the question and not the answer that delineates the documentary mode.

In *Standard Operating Procedure*, the audience is transported back to 2004, when the mass media were filled with reports of prisoners' torture and abuse in the Abu Ghraib jail at the hands of American soldiers. The famous photographs of the naked detainees, standing motionless on boxes for fear of electrocution, forming human pyramids or forced to perform sexual acts, are shown in Morris's film as real documents that become a channel for sharing violence between the spectator and the prisoner. These pictures, interspersed with the footage of interviews with the soldiers involved, punctuate the narrative of the documentary and result in a tense experience for the viewer. At the same time, the film creates a photographic archive that contains, as reported by the military police, strong evidence of suffering and cruelty. Suspense and violence stir emotional responses in the audience that generate anxiety, apprehension, and tension at three distinct levels: for something that is about to happen and cannot be predicted; for something that has happened and has been recognized as true and real; and because the enunciator's gaze has addressed us, the spectators, directly.

I argue that in this film there exist different levels of communication: the first level, and a key feature in all of Morris's films, is the one dominated by interviews. In *Standard Operating Procedure*, as in *The Fog of War* (2003), *Mr. Death* (1999), *Thin Blue Line* (1988), *Gates of Heaven* (1978), and the TV series *First Person* (2000), Morris used his new technology system, the Interrotron, a machine or, more precisely, a combination of different cameras, that creates a virtual eye contact between the interviewee and the spectator. The Interrotron is a modified dual-camera setup that uses a double teleprompter to present a video image of the interviewer's face beneath the lens, allowing the director to see the subject in his monitor through the reflection of his teleprompter. At the same time, the subject is able to see the director's face projected onto his/her teleprompter, positioned over the main film camera lens. Thanks to this apparatus, with what is known as "interpellation," or other terms such as "direct address" or "aside," in *Standard Operating Procedure* the interviewee finds him- or herself directly placed in the enunciating position. Like in a normal conversation between two persons he or she can identify himself/herself with the personal pronoun "I," and as such addresses a "You" (Errol Morris). In his study *Inside the Gaze*, Francesco Casetti (1999) writes:

> An I, who looks and sees, coincides with a he, whereas a you (who is meant to be looked at and is looked at, but is not seen) enters in the game without assuming any precise form. The enunciator is represented in a character, who depends on a question of action (the act of looking) and a question of framing (reaching the spectator), effecting a slippage from the level of enunciation to the level of the utterance. (9)

Frontal orientation, or frontality, produces a face-to-face encounter between character and screen (and viewer); it not only denotes the character's position but is also part of the film's perception, the way in which the film positions itself (Buckland 2000, 62). With the use of the Interrotron, Errol Morris aims to position himself inside the textual space as mere spectator, at the same level as the audience and at the same level of the person interviewed. The direction of the subjects' gazes thus coincides, creating an effect that is both intellectually and emotionally engaging. The spectator feels as if the interviewee is looking at him or her, displaying all of the usual facial reactions that are the result of a very intimate communicational context. The documentary thus produces a strong sense of intimacy, mimicking the situation case of an ordinary conversation between two people.

In *Standard Operating Procedure* the focal elements of this conversation are the Abu Ghraib photos showing the violence inflicted on the prisoners by the soldiers. The images, portraits of cruelty, are amplified, modified, narrated, re-enacted, and animated—adding, somehow, movement to the photos themselves. Hence, the 2D static pictures break their own frames, come alive, adding extra layers of violence that are perceived by the film's spectator. Obviously, these images also exist on their own, independent of Morris's film; but photos used in a film (as in this case) become part of the contextual narration. There is no doubt that the Abu Ghraib pictures contain acts of violence, cruelty, and brutality; but taken singularly, and not in a filmic context, these photos can be identified by the viewer like all of the other thousands and thousands of pictures of violence that TV shows us on a daily basis. In the presentation of such images by the media, there is no distinction between images, but simply an overall effect of sensationalism. Susan Sontag (2004) has claimed that people, when looking at images of the pain of other people, often react with indifference, as if they were participating in a sort of collective narcosis. In her influential *On Photography* (1977), Sontag thus explains the dangers of the photograph in relation to its spectator: "Images transfix. Images anesthetize" (20). We are surrounded by all kinds of images—including images of war, pain, misery, and cruelty—and, of course, this is not without consequence for us, contemporary viewers. We live in an age that is dominated by the infinite reproducibility and constant broadcasting of images, with almost no possibility of controlling the contexts in which they circulate. Sontag argues that the human reaction to the images of suffering, pain, and violence runs the gamut, from voyeurism to sympathy, from indignation to indifference. As she suggests: "To suffer is one thing; another thing is living with the photographed images of suffering, which does not necessarily strengthen conscience and the ability to be compassionate. It can also corrupt them" (20). Sontag drew from John Berger's arguments questioning the effectiveness of graphic war photographs. Berger (1980)

suggested in *About Looking* that the fact that images of horror are acceptable to the mainstream media demonstrates that such images are failing in their intended effect of denouncing violence (37–40).

Conversely, the Interrotron system effects precisely the opposite operation—even though it originates as a TV device (teleprompter), it breaks the rules of the standard visualization produced by television and forces the spectator to be an active and self-aware part of the communicative process of watching images. The spectator is fully involved in the filmic process of vision as an element of the communicative structure of the documentary; in this way, Morris creates an active participation that is painful, not only because of the images seen on the screen, but because of the way in which the device presents these images and addresses the spectator directly. The camera is an extraneous element that becomes voluntarily an active part of the narration. For this reason we, the spectators, can no longer hide. There is no way for us to escape from the violence, from the suffering, from the pain. This shows how the use of the technique of Interrotron, whether applied to interviews or to re-enactments, is always intended to work on, and to enhance, the communicative structure of the film.

In *Standard Operating Procedure,* the sense of intimacy that I mentioned above permeates the film from the beginning to the end. Morris adds private and personal emphasis to this by inserting pictures of the everyday life of the guards watching TV, swimming, sleeping, kissing, etc., as well as the home

FIGURE 12.1 *Errol Morris,* Standard Operating Procedure. *U.S.A.: Sony Pictures Classics, 2008. Lynndie England talks about her relationship with Charles Graner in front of the Interrotron. Screenshot.*

movies that they shot in jail. From time to time the spectator is presented with amateur sequences of a different technical and aesthetical nature, shot by the military police; sequences that portray both episodes of torture and images of daily life in prison. For instance, while Lynndie England talks about her relationship with Charles Graner (they were a couple during the period spent in Abu Ghraib) and her life in the army, the film shows us intimate images of the guards' small rooms/cells decorated with private objects, posters, and photos brought from outside.[2] We see amateur clips of the guards shot shortly after being stationed in Abu Ghraib. The everyday life of the warders is portrayed through pictures and videos, in exactly the same way as the episodes of violence. In this way, violence becomes normal and almost intimate; there no longer is a clear difference between ordinary routines and human abuse. Violence becomes natural; it combines itself with the context of the people living in Abu Ghraib, becoming part of their life.

The amateur footage of the guards and the prisoners, unlike the famous photos mentioned above, has scarcely been taken into account by TV news coverage. This is a striking point, which goes back to Berger's meditation on the acceptability of the image's value and Sontag's positing of the concept of narcosis, explored above: while showing the still photos from Abu Ghraib was considered ethically acceptable by the TV broadcasters, the amateur clips shot in the jail were rarely broadcast, even if they elaborated on the same content as the photographs, arguably due to the even higher emotional impact that they could have had on the public. The static photographs of torture and abuse, thus, could fall into the recognizable category of "images of horror," and thus are easier for the audience to digest because they seem familiar; while the clips, as home movies, would lure people into a sense of familiarity and intimacy, and were likely to have a strong impact on the audience, who would feel disturbed and disoriented, thus impeding the effect of narcosis.

I argue that the amateur sequences in this film represent a particular form of cinematic language, a type of speech that talks about something and generates different meaning (but without forgetting the original meaning). It may be viewed, then, in terms of what Barthes calls a metalanguage, a sort of "second order" language that acts on a "first order" one (Barthes 1972). It is a language that generates meaning out of already existent meaning in order to create—as in my case study—a number of different trajectories/meanings. Hence, for this analysis, amateur clips are not a particular object/text but rather "the way in which [the object] utters the message" (Barthes 1972, 109). Barthes asserts that myth is a system of signification and connotation that circulates around the dominant powers' values. This system of signification is found in everyday objects and signs—it permits a move towards the metalanguage itself, which can engage with spectator–text relationships and the ways in which documentaries inscribe an audience with their mode

of address. This means that it is not the mere signification of content of the amateur clip itself that really matters, but rather the medium context in which the clip is inserted. The medium creates and recreates its own environment because, as McLuhan (1967) has noted, "the medium is the message."

Home movies, like the ones present in *Standard Operating Procedure*, can be considered as documentation; in fact, it can be argued that the primary objective of shooting a home movie is not to make a film but to document a specific moment or event in our lives. Most people have experienced, at least once in their lives, the feeling of being behind a camera (including mobile phone cameras), filming a private party, a wedding, a ceremony, etc. Cameras are pervasive in our society; the use of video cameras is no longer limited to professionals. We have become accustomed to being behind, in front of, and to the side of cameras; we are constantly monitored by CCTV cameras; and a short appearance on the local (or national) news is an experience shared by many. The home-movie director shoots principally to enjoy the camera and to enjoy the moment that he or she is living. It is for a sort of personal use, even if the act of production implies a spectator/reader who will receive the work (and thus participate in the process of production itself).

Within a pragmatic approach of analysis, the home movies' spectator follows, in part, the semio-pragmatic documentary mode of reading (recognition of a real enunciator), and creates a sort of more intimate submode that Odin defines as "private" (2007, 255–71). This private mode does not work only at a communicative level, but also at a different level of rememorization. In other words, the documentary itself can be described as a process of collaborative reconstruction of public history through the recontextualization of amateur footage. This is exactly what Morris wants to achieve by using this nonprofessional material in his film, digging into the memory and private life of the guards and, at the same time, showing and ultimately re-enacting how violence took control of the Abu Ghraib prison. This could be described as a process of collaborative reconstruction of history. Hence the home movie becomes a record, full of authenticity, used for a function different from its original one; in Morris's film, it becomes a solid element of "truth" within a larger cinematic project. The private mode extends from the home movie (single amateur clips shot by the military police) to the documentary (Morris's film) and from the private into the public domain. In general, amateur films are products of individual people and are emotionally related to a private life that often extends into the public domain. According to Odin, home movies can be read as documents and used for a different purpose than that of their own private nature. The process of reading home movies as documents prompts us to employ the three points of the semio-pragmatic documentary mode mentioned above; by asking these questions, the spectator enters into a strong emotional relationship with the home movie, a relationship that "is

what gives home movie images their specific power. Their ability to seduce and to attract creates a magic that radically distinguishes home movies from news-reported images and from traditional documentaries" (Odin 2007, 264).

Home movies are multilayered products of our contemporary society, an open field of different aesthetics, perspectives and targets. They position themselves always at the border between fiction and documentary. The home movies in *Standard Operating Procedure* force us to change our processes of perception in relation to the concept of realism/truth that is typical of the documentary form; they look like external elements connected to the external, "real" world, not only in terms of narration but also in terms of quality of the image. If the first level of communication in *Standard Operating Procedure* is represented by the interviews, two more levels shape the communicative structure of the film. The second level is the domain of the amateur production (in which category I would include both the home movies and the still photos), while the third level is represented by the fictional re-enactments, a recurrent feature in Morris's productions (Morris 2004).

If we examine the second level, the amateur one, it can be seen that, within this private mode of reading, two different subgenres or metalanguages can be distinguished. The clips in *Standard Operating Procedure* are essentially divided in two groups: the first is about private experience, everyday life, love, emotions, and friendship; the second one (which looks very similar to the still images of torture inflicted on the detainees) has probably been filmed using a phone camera, a photo camera, or a cheap handycam, and portrays acts of violence, torture, and militarism.

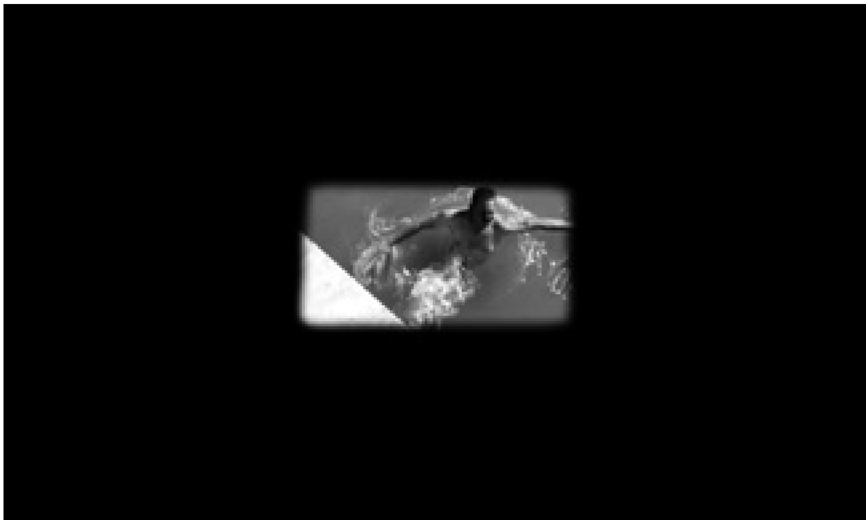

FIGURE 12.2 *Home movies (first group): the everyday life of the guards. Screenshot.*

The first group of clips, showing episodes of daily life of the soldiers, is distinguished by the presence of two amateur sequences: in the first one, already mentioned, and most likely filmed by England, we see a relaxed Graner smiling and swimming; it is their first summer over there, they are happy, they are enjoying the nice weather.

The composition of the images and the use of a zoom make it very difficult to determine where exactly the scene was shot. It represents a playful moment of freedom from army duties and, as if to reinforce this impression, the music, present in this film only during the re-enactments and the amateur clips and seldom during the interviews, is also playful, carousel-like. Directed by the music and by the amateur footage, the viewer finds, similarly to the soldiers, a way to escape the brutality of the images that were previously seen. In the entire film music is never a mere "background" component: each section has its own music theme and tempo, playing in this way an important part in the storytelling, rather than being a simple accompaniment. When his former lover gives a character description of Graner during her interview (which Morris places directly before this sequence), the music has an eerie, ominous tone that matches the content of her comments on the now incarcerated ex-soldier. At one point, the music stops dramatically in order to let England declare her mistake: she had allowed love to cloud her judgment.

The second sequence of the group of home movies depicting episodes of daily life is a clip of a soldier playing with a kitten. In this case the camera operator did not include the face of the subject in the shot but, instead, filmed the animal in closeup. However, it is implicit that the man is Graner and the strategy employed here provides us with a different view of the character. This scene concludes the segment of the film that deals with the love affair between England and Graner. The pattern of violence has been clearly established but, as this example shows, through the use of almost child-like music and the visual association with a kitten, Morris reminds us that Garner was a human being, a man capable of moments of tenderness. This group of amateur clips inserted in Morris's documentary is very peaceful, with little indication of violence. They represent the guards' normal, everyday behavior and concur with Philip Gourevitch and Errol Morris's (2008) own observation, in their book *Standard Operating Procedure*, that "[t]he MPs felt safe walking the streets; they made friends with the Iraqis, played with their kids, shopped in their markets, ate in their outdoor cafés" (72).

These home-movie clips of daily life are edited in the film together, as a sole entity, with the snapshots of violence. They are new to most spectators of *Standard Operating Procedure*: they do not show scenes of violence, as the majority of the photos that we are used to seeing do, but serve as a necessary counterpoint to the images of abuse. In other words, Morris

FIGURE 12.3 *Home movies (second group): episodes of violence. Screenshot.*

purposely uses home-movie footage in the film to offer a more nuanced, complex version of the Abu Ghraib case and, by implication, challenges the viewer in ways that mainstream media had not developed. This is, most frequently, the central purpose of documentaries: to give a more global vision on specific topics. The clips in the second group (home movies of abuses), conversely, show a completely different content and the quality of the images is poorer than in the previous group. These three amateur sequences are very similar to each other and portray soldiers (dressed) and detainees (naked) during a torture session.

These images are confused and very dark. The impression of violence is very strong but the poor camerawork makes it difficult to understand clearly what kind of violence has been committed on the detainees in the amateur videos. This problem is promptly solved by Errol Morris, by including the static (and well defined) photograph which corresponds to the violence represented in the home-movie clip itself. These moving images are an integral part of the still images' context; they share the same content and they have the same ethical impact. The video, with its aesthetic approach and completeness of information, manages to bring home fully the real gravity of a situation utterly void of human respect, something that had already been established by the still photos. The two groups of amateur clips are not dissimilar in terms of quality; what really sets a boundary between the two is the music that accompanies them. In fact, when it is present (in the second clip it is replaced by ambient sound: wind and footsteps), it is subtly ominous and minimal. It is music that leads the narration for a few seconds, and that forces the

spectator to explore different levels of communication. In particular, in the scenes of violence (the second group of amateur clips) the music slows down as if to make the spectators reflect and better understand what is going on, allowing them to react to them emotionally (and, probably, physically).

The practice of including amateur clips into mainstream documentary is not unique to the methodology of Errol Morris: another noteworthy example of cinematic documentary dealing with home movies is Andrew Jarecki's *Capturing the Friedmans* (2003). A comparison between these two films throws into relief the particular way in which Morris uses the amateur footage in *Standard Operating Procedure*. The amount of amateur footage used in *Capturing the Friedmans* is impressive, and is used to tell the story of an American family in a very intimate way. We witness dinners, conversations, and arguments between family members. The entire context of the film is highly dramatic but what these home movies (from the 1980s) really succeed in capturing is the dissolution of an American family in a very detailed way. The focus is diverted, from time to time, often far from the main topic of the film: the arrest of Arnold and Jesse Friedman (a father and his youngest son) for child molestation. The home-movie clips in this film are mainly shot by the Friedmans for the Friedmans. They took home videos while Arnold and Jesse were waiting, at home, for the trial. In contrast to what Morris does in his film, in Jarecki's documentary the home clips are unidirectional and run together with the main narration, without creating multiple layers of meaning. They do not open up different interpretations of what is shown but are there, as in classic commercial documentaries, as an accompaniment, to add information and clarify the main topic treated by the film itself. In *Capturing the Friedmans*, the home movies work to build up the entire story and to bring this story to us: conversely, in *Standard Operating Procedure*, the amateur clips are used to develop further the Abu Ghraib case in front of the public opinion, providing alternative information and different points of view. Morris's main challenge in this film was to describe a specific violent event in the most "real" way possible, not from a purely visual and aesthetic perspective, but as perceived by the subjects involved: guards (filming and torturing) and prisoners (being filmed and tortured).

In order to achieve this objective, the context, the personal stories, the amateur clips, and the sequences of interviews shot using complex camera set-ups become central. This is especially the case when viewing the second group of home-movie clips, the ones depicting violence, which represent a sort of reinforcement of the content and emotional impact of the still photos. At the same time, with regards to the ones showing the guards' everyday life, the spectator is transported outside the realm of violence to a "safe" place where a different type of emotion is generated. All these elements are added to the documentary in order to develop a new way of reading the episodes of

violence, because "the goal of *Standard Operating Procedure* is not to uncover the 'real story' behind the Abu Ghraib scandal but to understand what the photographs have meant to us and why they remain so multivalent, such an open wound" (Benson-Allott 2009, 44). Hence, through various stratagems the film situates the audience very close to the events and to the people involved in them, in a sort of process of mimesis and participation, which is a recurring characteristic of many nonfictional films highlighted by the pragmatic approach. The inclusion of home movies, in particular, increases the emotional impact on the spectator and results in an incisive comment on the "normality" of violence in the Abu Ghraib context; furthermore, with their impression and value of irrefutable reality, the home movies help the spectator of the documentary to interrogate the real enunciator in terms of truth, which as we have seen is an all-important process of the spectator's engagement with the mode of vision produced by the nonfiction film.

Notes

1 In *Cognitive Semiotics of Film*, Warren Buckland (2000) writes about Odin's documentary mode in these terms: "Rejecting a semiotics of realization as a criterion for defining the documentary mode, Odin instead opts for a semiotics of reading to define its specificity. In Greimassian terms, Odin rejects a referential theory of truth (study of the relation between signs and their extra-textual reality) for a study of veridiction—the modality of truth/reality as articulated by enunciator and addressee. Most of Odin's essay is concerned with characterizing the specificity of the documentary mode according to the documentarizing reading strategy adopted by film spectators, and with outlining how this documentarizing reading is triggered by the film and the institutions in which it is screened" (99).

2 Graner was convicted and sentenced to ten years in prison for the Abu Ghraib abuses. He was already released from military prison.

PART FOUR

Amateur Auteur

13

"I am a time archaeologist": Some Reflections on the Filmmaking Practice of Péter Forgács

Richard Kilborn

Over the last three decades, the Hungarian film and video artist Péter Forgács has produced a body of work that has gained him an international reputation. He once famously described himself as a "time archaeologist" (Spieker 2002), someone interested in gathering or unearthing fragments from different sources (home movie collections, film archives, and photo libraries and the like) and artfully reassembling them to provide illuminating insights into twentieth-century European history that would not be forthcoming in the interpretations offered by professional historians. This chapter explores some of the defining features of Forgács's film- and videomaking practice, and considers the ways in which his 2006 film *Miss Universe 1929: Lisl Goldarbeiter – A Queen in Wien* can be seen to exemplify his approach to filmmaking.

At one level, *Miss Universe 1929* concerns itself with the life and times of a beautiful Jewish girl whose family was living in Vienna, then the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Lisl remains a strong presence throughout the film, but the figure who arguably acquires equal, if not greater, narrative significance is Lisl's cousin Marci, whose family lived in the Hungarian city of Szeged. Marci was born in the same year as Lisl, 1909, and their lives were to remain forever intertwined. As a young man, Marci had developed what was to become a lifelong passion for photography and home moviemaking,

FIGURE 13.1 *Lisl Goldarbeiter, photographed in 1929, the year she won the Miss Universe contest. Screenshot.*

FIGURE 13.2 *Lisl's cousin Marci, the enthusiastic home moviemaker. Screenshot.*

an interest that may well have been activated by his desire to capture images of his beautiful cousin, with whom he was smitten from an early age.

Photography proves, however, to be something of a double-edged sword for Marci, as the film quickly goes on to explain. When Lisl is 20, Marci submits photos of her to the organizers of the first Miss Austria contest.[1] This proves to be a life-changing event for Lisl (and for that matter, Marci). Later in 1929 she is crowned Miss Austria and, soon after, she comes second in the Miss Europe beauty contest in Paris. Later that same year she sets sail, together with other European beauty queens, for America (Galveston, Texas) where, by unanimous decision of the jury, she is awarded the title of Miss Universe. The rest of Forgács's film explores the impact on Lisl's life of this meteoric rise to fame and its aftermath. For a few brief, ill-fated years in the early 1930s she is pitched into a hollow, high-society world from which she eventually escapes, back into the welcoming arms of Marci.

Forgács's method

Much of Forgács's work to date has involved him in the production of documentary-like artifacts using the substantial archive of home movie and photographic material that he has accumulated over the years. In talking about Forgács's compositional method, however, it is important to emphasize that all the original "found" elements have been extensively reworked, recontextualized and transformed into films that invite viewers to relate what is depicted to their own knowledge and experience. In this respect, Forgács's works are much more than compilation films. The reworked material—though it still bears the telltale traces of those who were initially responsible for it—has now been absorbed into a characteristically multilayered and carefully orchestrated text. One of the intentions of this recontextualizing exercise is to invite the viewer to consider how these essentially private events, as recorded by the erstwhile photographers and home moviemakers, relate to those played out on the wider public stage. In issuing this tacit invitation to reflect upon the interconnectedness of private and public worlds, Forgács is well aware that his work is bound to present a considerable challenge to the contemporary viewer. His approach largely eschews conventional modes of presentation as favored by most contemporary historians (especially those presenting series for the major TV networks), in which a narrator provides a supposedly authoritative account of events. Forgács's works, on the other hand, make no such "definitive" claims. Instead they are fashioned and presented in such a way as to produce texts that are sufficiently open and fragmented to challenge the viewer into new ways of viewing history. As Forgács himself has observed:

> As in literature, so in cinematography, the *open* piece gives far more surface for the imagination than does the linear narrative. This accounts for the associative jumps in my work, the shifts from the *personal* to the *public*, back and forth, and/or the frequent lack of imagery … [My work] is an attempt at a new kind of film narrative, because it is always fragmented, and while the videos don't fall apart, they do include holes, vacuums, tabulae rasae, all kind of mistakes, pauses, taboos, and black holes. These *discontinuities* offer the viewer an opportunity to reconstruct a narrative from the ruins of a filmic memory. (Quoted in MacDonald 2005, 304; emphasis in original)

The origins of Forgács's "archaeological" filmmaking practice

For Forgács, who grew up in Hungary during the 1960s and 1970s, there were severe limits imposed upon publicly articulating views that would be considered in any way at variance with those of the Communist Party. Mindful of these constraints, but still wishing to address issues relating to developments in twentieth-century Hungarian and European history, Forgács began to consider the possibilities afforded by a less direct means of expression, one that would not fall foul of rigorously imposed state censorship.[2] Thus, he began to explore the potential offered by family-centered home movie material shot by amateur filmmakers in central Europe between the two World Wars. As Scott MacDonald (2005) has observed:

> Forgacs's exploration of home movies began as a way of coming to terms with his Hungarian heritage, and especially the psychic complexities of living in a rigorously totalitarian communist state, where much of what one knows and feels in private is dangerous to admit publicly. (290)

Forgács had developed an interest in collecting home movies and family photographs in the early 1980s while working as a research fellow at the Cultural Research Institute in Budapest. He quickly recognized that such material would provide different views and insights into Hungary's and central Europe's past from those made available by officially sanctioned histories. In Forgács's words:

> The reason why I was up to collect home movies was the distorted, censored, and destroyed past and the inconsistent continuity of traditions and history … *My terrain is the unofficial visual imprint of my culture,* and I

> soon realized this image collection might represent something new and fill some of the gaps of the … lost past. (Quoted in Spieker 2002; emphasis added)

Forgács's "Private Photo and Film Archive" (PPFA), established in 1982, provided him with a rich repository of material on which he was able to draw for much of his later film and video work.[3] As a self-confessed "time-archaeologist," however, he considered his PPFA as but a starting point for a series of historical investigations that would expose parts of history that had hitherto remained relatively under-explored, if not entirely hidden from view. As Forgács puts it:

> I'm interested in going below the surface of the home movies and amateur films I have access to, not because I want to patronise these films or to see them merely as examples of some idea, but because they reveal a level of history that is recorded in no other kind of cinema—a level of history that governments and large commercial enterprises don't see as important or valuable, but that can show us a great many things about the realities and complexities of history as it is lived by real people. (Quoted in MacDonald, 2005, 299)

"Going below the surface" is for Forgács not only the archaeological act of appropriating, recovering and archiving private reels and family photographs. It also includes all those subsequent more creative acts in which the original material is rigorously "interrogated" before being reworked into a much more open-ended text, thus requiring the viewer to consider the meaning of its many structuring absences.[4]

One of the strategies that Forgács adopts when creatively recycling material is to interview surviving family members who appeared in the original footage or, on occasion, with the originators of the footage themselves. In the case of *Miss Universe*, he was fortunate enough to discover the nonagenarian Marci Taenzer, a lifelong filmmaker, and conduct an extended interview with him. Forgács punctuates the narrative of the film with extracts from this interview, which focuses largely on Marci's memories of his beautiful cousin, whom he was eventually to marry. Having gained access to the films from Marci's private home movie collection, Forgács is able to draw a strong narrative link between those acts-of-witness sequences where Marci is seen nostalgically recalling Lisl's life and their time together and the filmic record of these same lives that Forgács has assembled from a multiplicity of sources, including Marci's own collection. In this way the film acquires its characteristic multiple perspective, in which the public and the private become strongly interwoven.

For Forgács, going below the surface not only involves accessing and representing the private histories of the Goldarbeiter and Taenzer families; it also means giving the audience the opportunity to reflect on the way in which these private lives are significantly determined by events occurring in the public sphere. Thus, in every Forgács film, there is a subtle intermeshing of public and private worlds and the viewer is always—either implicitly or explicitly—made aware of the wider socio-historical context of the on-screen events (see also Nichols 2003, 2).[5]

This bringing together of the public and the private is almost always discernible in Forgács's films. It is as if he is encouraging his audience to look upon his work as a starting point for further conjectures, especially concerning the kind of society that was shaping the lives of the central protagonists in his films.[6] Whilst Forgács is aware that he is sometimes asking a lot of his audience when they engage with his work, he is hopeful that perseverance will bring its own rewards. As he once observed:

> Learning to re-see the found footage can reveal new aspects of the home movie, new aspects of my discourse on private and public history. Specifically, these ephemeral, faulty, scratchy images can't be appreciated as parts of a clear, single story. Do they mean anything at all? Do

FIGURE 13.3 *Hitler comes to power in Germany. Screenshot.*

> they help us understand what "really" happened in the past? What *is* the "past"? What *is* my memory? And what is collective memory? Or tribal memory? And do all these forms of memory correlate with one another? What is *private* and what is *public memory*? Which are the official and the non-official dimensions of history? (Quoted in MacDonald 2005, 320; emphasis in original)[7]

An allusive art?

If Forgács's films are to be viewed as historical explorations, it is important to remember that all the historical contextualizing that occurs is worked into these texts *sotto voce* rather than becoming a *prima facie* concern of the filmic narrative. As Wees (2010) puts it:

> The history of Europe circa 1930–1960 is lived—and filmed—by ordinary people going about their daily lives *while the developments that occupy professional historians—social unrest, the rise of Fascism, the war in Eastern Europe—take place, for the most part, "off screen"*. (1; emphasis added)

FIGURE 13.4 *Lisl and Marci get married in August 1949. Screenshot.*

It might be claimed, then, that one of Forgács's achievements as an experimental filmmaker is to alert his audience to what was happening, not only "outside the frame" but also elsewhere in the public arena.[8] *Miss Universe 1929*, is, for instance, at one level concerned with the heart-warming story of how, after many vicissitudes, Lisl and Marci are finally reunited and then spend almost four decades together as man and wife, till Lisl's death in 1997. At another level, however, the film has more sinister undertones. These are the same "dark undercurrents" to which Forgács refers when he imagines the response of the contemporary (early twenty-first century) audience to his works.[9] Thus, even as we are witnessing these individuals in their more carefree, happy moments, we remain acutely aware of the storm clouds that were gathering over Europe. Forgács (2003) refers to this burden of historical awareness on the part of his audience in the following terms:

> For us today, here and now, with our historical knowledge, we add an unforgettable and unforgiving dramatic perspective; *the invisible shadows over [their] happy moments.* This happy moment conjures in our mind other constructions as *deep undercurrents of unconscious expectations*—tortuous death in a gas chamber—an undercurrent hidden at this film moment to the future victims. It is therefore never realised, made visible, in my films. (Quoted in Nichols 2003, 6; emphasis added)

It is probably appropriate in this connection to speak of Forgács's characteristic allusive manner of presenting his work. Thus, at one level *Miss Universe 1929* presents us with a "star-crossed lovers" story, Marci and Lisl eventually finding each other again after circumstances have long kept them apart. At the same time, however, viewers soon become aware that the film is employing a different and more complex mode of address than in a more traditional historical documentary (see also MacDonald 2005, 313). Here there is often an unwritten rule that the image track and the accompanying soundtrack will support each other to assist audience orientation and understanding. With Forgács, however, there is far less consonance between sound and image tracks. Viewers have quickly to adjust to the fact that there will be a constant disruption of any sustained narrative flow. This is partly because the filmic text is manifestly composed of so many disparate elements, each of which provides a subtly different emotional or imaginative stimulus.

Management of sound and image track

On occasions in Forgács's work the relationship between image and soundtrack becomes decidedly contrapuntal, as if he is seeking to communicate to us the idea of the huge gulf between appearance (*Schein*) and reality (*Sein*) during those troubled times. On the surface, much of what we witness seems to be sweetness and light. But appearances can be very deceptive. Early on in the film, for instance, there is a good example of this, when—as we witness an apparently innocent street scene in Vienna—the musical accompaniment sounds a distinctly warning note. A little later on, Forgács introduces some newsreel footage depicting Emperor Franz Joseph in a setting that evokes all the glitter and the grandeur of prewar Vienna. This is immediately followed by a series of shots of 1920s Vienna, depicting tramcars and bustling street life, underscored by a happy refrain from a popular song. This time, however, it is the commentary—voiced by Forgács himself—that alerts us to much darker realities beneath the idyllic façade: "The popular Viennese coffee houses were always full, due partly to miserable living conditions." Finally, lest his audience be in any doubt about the idea of "storm-clouds brewing," Forgács includes some footage of couples waltzing in a Viennese street to the accompaniment of jarringly discordant music. There could be no more powerful evocation of a generation teetering on the brink of the apocalypse.

It is through the agency of the soundtrack—and above all through the addition of specially composed music—that Forgács creates some of his most telling effects. Quite often, as in the example of the parodic music accompanying the Viennese waltzers, the effect is to create a sense of impending threat. Such cautionary, warning notes are sounded at key moments throughout the film, frequently—one assumes—to alert viewers not to take everything that they see at face value (see also Nichols and Renov 2011, 90). Any meanings that we might choose to ascribe to Forgács's films thus emerge from the combined force of all the visual and auditory elements of the original material, transformed and recontextualized. Indeed, because there is so much emphasis in Forgács's work on the reorchestration of already existing material, his films have often been regarded as music-like compositions.[10] Forgács himself has frequently underlined that musical character of his work, and many of his films are the result of close collaboration between himself and the Hungarian composer Tibor Szemző.[11] It is certainly of some significance that Forgács has sometimes referred to his works as "video operas" and to himself as a "video artist" (Boyle 2001). In most of his works there is indeed a conscious effort to mold or forge all of the sounding elements into a musical or opera-like composition. As he once explained with reference to *Meanwhile Somewhere...1940–1943*, a film produced in

1994 but which established the pattern for almost all his subsequent work, including *Miss Universe 1929*:

> The sound track was composed as a whole soundscape, so every effect is part of the music … I didn't put sound everywhere it could have been because I don't want to use the sound effect to illustrate. I wanted to use it on a metaphysical level of apperception. Do these things really *exist*? Is it *real* water? Are they *real* persons? … The soundtrack is also a part of getting near and getting far from the screen. And that's how the music and the sound effects work. Sometimes it's alienating and sometimes it is very meditative, and you don't know where you are. It's a part of a bad dream … I would say this is contextual art, that the meaning comes out of the context where it appears. It can be an abstract sound, it can be an image, it can be any layer of the piece. (Quoted in Boyle 2001; emphasis in original)

I have quoted Forgács's words at length not only because they provide some valuable insights into his more general *modus operandi*, but also because they give a clear idea of how he envisages the potential viewer's response. Forgács knows that the home movie, newsreel, and other documentary-type visual material that evokes such a wealth of "cultural, personal, historic, emotional [and] sensual experience" is bound to elicit a strong affective response. But he is equally aware that the audience's confrontation with his work can be a deeply unsettling experience, precisely because they are made acutely aware of the precariousness of the subjects' lives and the fates that awaited them. As Forgács puts it:

> When you fall into my work (if you're an ideal viewer!), at the same time you fall into your own imagination, dreams, feelings; you realize, *all this could have happened to us.* It's not an *actor* who dies; it's *him* and *her*. It's *us* … In a dramatic narrative film, the actor never dies, only the *role*. But here it's the opposite; the real people die, but their *roles* as people doing mundane things continue in our lives. (Quoted in MacDonald 2005, 315; emphasis in original)

Narrative organization and authorial presence

One of the most notable features of *Miss Universe 1929* is that, though it purports to be a biographical account (underlined by the multiple referencing of Lisl in the title), the woman herself remains an enigmatic figure. It is always through others' eyes that she is viewed. And though in the first part of the

film Forgács sometimes includes extracts from her personal diary (whispered in the voiceover by an actress), there is little of the intimate, revelatory information that would have been provided by a more conventional biopic. Forgács clearly has a very different set of priorities: to alert the viewer to the circumstances in which the home-movie footage was captured and to mark the extensive authorial intervention that has occurred in the creation of this opera-like composition. It as if he is constantly trying to remind his viewers that there are always many different ways of witnessing, recording, accounting for, and coming to terms with, the past.[12] And even though Forgács never personally enters the frame in *Miss Universe 1929*, we are always made conscious of his authorial role, both as principal investigator ("time archaeologist") and as the shaping intelligence behind the work. Early on in the film he identifies himself as the person responsible for unearthing this story ("The story of Lisl and Marci is one that one waits for [for] years") and quickly slips into the role of authoritative narrator. Not only does he identify people and places in the interpolated film and video footage, but he also—via intertitles, captions and voiceover commentary—provides us with relevant biographical details of his subjects' lives and information relating to the worsening political situation that will have such dire consequences for members of both Marci's and Lisl's families.

On the other hand, Forgács never becomes wholly reliant on these traditional devices for providing narrative guidance. He also employs other devices that reveal a quasi-Brechtian detachment. Consider, for instance, the use of captions and intertitles such as the following: "At Long Last in 1909 the World Beauty is Born in Vienna," "Our Filmmaker Sets the World Beauty on the Path to Fame," and "The Prince of Ties Comes for the World Beauty in an Eight-Cylinder Bugatti." While these are reminiscent of silent movies, they are also evidently meant to provide a kind of ironic commentary on the narrative proceedings. Another device that is typical of Forgács's stylistic approach is the interpolation of short sequences from old film footage depicting various types of "Peeping Tom" voyeurism, which regularly punctuate the first half of the film. Though their significance is never explained, these short snippets might be seen as providing a silent critical commentary on some of the more tawdry aspects of the beauty contest world and of gender inequality.

One further way in which Forgács prompts his audience to critical reflection is when he sometimes deliberately inserts an image that clearly belongs chronologically to a much later point in the story. One of the best examples of this comes at the moment when Lisl has just been crowned Miss Universe and when Marci is expressing his "devoted thanks" to Lisl for all the letters and cards that she has sent him. The lovelorn Marci's paean to his cousin culminates in the words "You are the Queen of the World," at which point Forgács simply inserts—with no commentary whatsoever—a

short color sequence depicting a much older gray-haired Lisl, smiling serenely as she exits a city subway. Such moments seem to be a kind of gently teasing authorial nudge. It is as if Forgács is suggesting that there is always a prospective, anticipatory dimension to (his)story telling as well as a retrospective one. Alternatively, one might regard this kind of narrative disruption as signaling Forgács's aspiration to have his work resemble a dreamlike creation, one in which fragments of historical memory are reassembled into a construct that can penetrate beneath the surface of our conscious being and pose questions about our view of history and the world that are both challenging and disturbing. As Forgács once observed:

> Most of the filmmakers use archive material and home-movie stuff, use these images for illustrating an idea, a problem, and a sociological or historical fact for their film. For me it's the opposite; it's the message of the film fragments that is important and my challenge is to put together a new story … The bits and pieces of the old home movies are more like parts of a *dream work. My recontextualising construction is more a kind of restructuring of the dreamwork. My aim is to open up the secret vaults of a personal, private history memory archive of those lives*. (Quoted in Spieker 2002; emphasis added)

Concluding remarks

Forgács has created a series of highly original and thought-provoking works that have the capacity to delight and to disturb in almost equal measure. At the heart of this work is a series of explorations that makes extensive use of home-movie material and other types of found footage that are reworked into a text that makes claim on our attention for reasons other than those for which they were originally intended. Though the past—to use an overworked cliché—is brought to life again through these flickering grainy images, one always has the feeling as a viewer that these evocations of a lost world are infused with doubts, anxieties and fears. These evocations elicit a meditative, contemplative response from the viewer rather than rosy-hued nostalgia. We may share in the carefree cavortings and celebrations of families and of couples, but at the same time we are made painfully aware that many of these individuals will soon be caught up in the terrifying maelstrom of deportation and extermination. Above all, this is a form of filmmaking in which the filmic text—for all its gaps, inconsistencies and ellipses—still has the capacity to evoke both an imaginative and a thoughtful response from its audience. As Bill Nichols (2003) has perceptively noted:

> Forgács turns salvaged images into a vivid glimpse of a lost world. The spontaneous gestures, improvised scenes and concrete situations we observe were not designed as indicators of broad historical forces but as animated mementos of personal history. But the social actors in these home movies who mime gestures to each other now incite our response rather than the response of those to whom they originally addressed themselves. (4)

A Forgács film positions us as latter-day witnesses to a series of mundane family-centered events that occurred many decades previously. These nostalgic revisitations never, however, become an end in themselves but, rather, are part of a more challenging cultural project that prompts questions and raises ideas of much wider (historical) import. Thus, while in *Miss Universe 1929* the primary narrative interest appears at first sight to be focused on Lisl, Marci, and on members of their respective families, the film quickly takes on a larger life, one that encourages us to indulge in more far-reaching speculations and reflections. How does all the person-centered information relate to our knowledge of contemporaneous historical events? And how do these largely celebratory images depicting events in the familial microdomain relate to the more menacing macroworld of public and political affairs?

Thus, though much of *Miss Universe 1929* is concerned with tracking the lives of Lisl and Marci and telling how they rediscovered each other again after many years of separation, the film also quietly insists on reminding us of the fate that befell many members of Jewish families during those times. Marci and Lisl may have been spared, but—as Forgács reminds us in the film—other members of the family were not so fortunate: "Lisl's father was taken back to Vienna and locked up in a Gestapo prison. Rumor had it that people got shot in the head there." Though the film never leaves the viewer in any doubt about the "dark undercurrents" of those times, one of Forgács's abiding concerns remains that of paying tribute to those individuals who created the original stock of images on which he has been able to draw so extensively. It is no coincidence that in *Miss Universe 1929* Forgács chooses to begin and end with references to the key role performed by filmmaker Marci. In the closing moments of the film Marci is, therefore, once again allowed to take center stage and to pronounce the following heartfelt tribute to his beloved Lisl: "Peter. Believe me. As relative, admirer, and later, husband—I'm telling you. Never has a more beautiful woman walked the earth. Never before or after." Forgács then cuts to a shot of Marci as a young man cheerfully waving to whomever was filming him (and by extension, of course, to us), at the same time energetically cranking his small cine camera. In a world of often painful and certainly turbulent change, filming and filmmaking have—at least for Forgács—remained the one reassuring constant.

Notes

1 As one of the film's intertitles informs us: "Our Filmmaker Sets the Unknown World Beauty on the Path to Fame."

2 Many filmmakers working in socialist states during the cold war period developed the art of "writing between the lines" in the same way that their audiences also became adept at "reading between the lines" for concealed political statements and comments that could never be explicitly stated.

3 Note that for Forgács, as for many collectors, the accumulation of home-movie material became an obsessive activity. As he once observed: "For six years, the film and photo collecting was just a kind of archivist mania: the archaeology of the vanishing past" (quoted in Spieker 2002).

4 This is what Forgács has to say about his recycling of home movie material: "These slices out of the constant, linear flow of time are full of gaps, but the filmmakers didn't care about the gaps. On the other hand for us, the gaps, and their meanings are part of what gets revealed by the films, once they're recycled into 'my' films" (quoted in MacDonald 2005, 312).

5 Forgács is well aware that much of the home-movie footage that comes into his hands was largely conceived for celebratory purposes such as family get-togethers, excursions, and anniversaries (see MacDonald 2005, 314).

6 Forgács makes the following comment on the relationship between the public and the private in his films: "Private footage becomes historic evidence of a certain mood, of a background; a color or a gesture or a smile, or the shape of a face, reveals dimensions of a society that are never visible in public art" (quoted in MacDonald 2005, 308).

7 Forgács made these remarks with respect to his film *A Bibó Reader* (2001), but later in the same interview he makes the point that his observations could apply to virtually all his other work.

8 It is no coincidence that one of Forgács's best-known works, released in 1994, is titled *Meanwhile Somewhere*.

9 In this respect, *Miss Universe* bears a strong resemblance to both *Free Fall* (1996) and *The Maelstrom* (1997). In all three works there is a juxtaposition of image sequences that suggests an ordered world where some degree of happiness and contentment can be achieved with other images and allusions of an altogether darker tone and resonance (see also Nichols 2003, 3).

10 Early on in his career, Forgács earned a reputation for himself as a musician and performance artist.

11 See also Boyle (2001) for more extended reflections on Tibor Szemző's contribution.

12 Deirdre Boyle (2001) reminds us that Forgács was always fond of quoting Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* when talking about his work. The lines that he repeatedly quotes are: "Everything we see could be otherwise. Everything we can describe at all could be also otherwise."

14

Representing the Past and the Meaning of Home in Péter Forgács's *Private Hungary*

Ruth Balint

Since the 1980s, Hungarian filmmaker Péter Forgács has been working with old home movies and amateur films, using them as the foundation upon which to create his extraordinary narratives of twentieth-century European, mostly Hungarian, history.[1] His films provide unique and telling insight into the experiences of ordinary individuals whose lives intersected with, and were shaped by, the historical events of the twentieth century, and they make a significant intervention in contemporary historical debates around issues of representation and memory. Yet, to date, there have been few to engage with Forgács's work from outside a film studies perspective, and little attention has been paid to it by historians. This chapter is an attempt to redress this gap. As a historian, I am primarily interested in the ways in which Forgács's signature work, *Private Hungary* (known in Hungarian as *Privát Magyarország*), offers both a challenge to the official memory of the past in twentieth-century Hungary and a creative response to the debate around the limits of historical representation. Further, as this chapter will discuss, Forgács's use of home movies interrogates our most fundamental conceptions of home. Home is revealed for the contemporary viewer of *Private Hungary* as a historically conditioned and contingent space; a place in which the traditional associations of refuge and sanctuary are violently exposed as a desperate, though no less desirable, fantasy.

Private Hungary began in 1988 with the first installment known as *The Bartos Family* (*A Bartos család*).[2] It is a series of 15 documentaries, the most recent of which, *I am Von Hófler: Variations on Werther* (*Von Höfler vagyok*

– *Werther variáció*), was released in 2008.[3] There are others not officially included in the series that are nonetheless important in any consideration of Forgács's oeuvre and his methodology, in particular *Miss Universe 1929 – Lisl Goldarbeiter* (2006); *El Perro Negro* (2005); *Danube Exodus* (*Dunai Exodus*, 1998); *The Maelstrom* (*A Malestrom*; 1997); and *Meanwhile Somewhere… 1940–1943* (*Miközben valahol*, 1994). For the purpose of simplification I also refer to these, with the exception of *El Perro Negro*, which I have omitted from this discussion, under the *Private Hungary* rubric. They are unlike the others in that they are not wholly Hungarian in origin, but the similarities outweigh the differences, both in form and in their thematic concerns.

Taken together, the films within the *Private Hungary* series represent a richly embroidered microhistorical tapestry of European, mostly Hungarian, life over the course of the twentieth century (Varga 2008, 88). Almost all touch in some way on the subjects of the Holocaust, fascism and communism. In this way, Forgács's films are also part of a broader movement of historical revisioning following the fall of communism which, as Catherine Portuges (2001) notes, is a particularly pertinent project in the postsocialist cinema of central Europeans seeking to reclaim, reintegrate and restore twentieth-century history and its legacy (108).

The range of stories is remarkable. *Meanwhile Somewhere…* is a patchwork of found footage, clandestine, amateur, and propaganda films of the Second World War, in which private stories of war interlink. One of these shows the punishment of two young lovers, an 18-year-old German boy and his 17-year-old Polish girlfriend, in a village in occupied Poland. Lászlo Dudás made his own short fiction films in *D-Film* (1992), while simultaneously filming the reannexation of northern Hungary. The soldier Lázslo Rátz took his camera to the Russian war front in the Ukraine in *The Land of Nothing* (*A semni orzága*, 1996). Captain Andrásovits, captain of the river boat *Erzsébet Királyné*, filmed the boat journey along the Danube of Jewish refugees bound for Palestine; on his return he took a new load of passengers, German Bessarabian refugees forcibly relocated to Austria (*Danube Exodus*, 1998). The young admirer Marci Tanzer captured his love for his beautiful cousin through the camera and made her famous in *Miss Universe 1929: Lisl Goldarbeiter – A Queen in Wien* (2006).

Kádár's Kiss (*Csermanek csókja*,1997), *A Bibó Reader* (*Bibó breviárium*, 2001), and *The Bishop's Garden* (*A püspok Kertje*, 2002) differ from the other films of the series. *Kádár's Kiss* uses a composition of found footage to create a montage of images exposing the period known as "ghoulash communism" in Hungary during the Kádár era of the 1960s. This was a particularly strange period in Hungarian communist history following the 1956 revolution and the violent reprisals of its aftermath, during which the Kádár regime sought to consolidate its power through half-hearted economic reforms and a

propaganda campaign aimed at reinventing the 1956 revolution as a counter-revolution. In *Kádár's Kiss* Forgács presents this period as one of cheap betrayals, materiality, and collective amnesia about the recent past.[4]

A Bibó Reader and *The Bishop's Garden* represent a different kind of departure from the *Private Hungary* canon. These are deeply meditative works, exploring the lives and legacies of two key intellectual figures in twentieth-century Hungarian history. Lászlo Ravasz, the subject of *The Bishop's Garden*, was a Calvinist Bishop and politician who voted for the first two "anti-Jewish" laws in 1938 and 1939 but, a year later, stood publicly against Jewish persecution. István Bibó was his son-in-law, an eminent ethicist, philosopher, politician and historian, whose historical and philosophical writings addressed some of the most confronting questions of his time, most famously anti-Semitism and the development of Hungary between the wars. These writings inform the internal rhythm and argument of the film which, as Catherine Portuges (2011) argues, is for Forgács also a way of addressing the political evolution of post-communist eastern Europe and the ongoing silencing of Hungary's recent history (162).

Private Hungary

Most of Forgács's films revolve around the footage taken by a single individual, whose private world becomes the microcosm through which a wider experience of history is explored. The lives of his home moviemakers intersected with some of the most tumultuous events of the twentieth century and Forgács selects his fragments and then reassembles and remixes them in a process that aims to reveal the epic dimension of personal, ordinary lives. They are deeply textured works, comprising a unique collaboration between the home moviemakers of the past and Forgács himself. In an interview with Sven Spieker (2002), he explains:

> The past is something that in a sense I make out of the bits and pieces … Most filmmakers use archive material and home-movie to illustrate an idea, a problem, a sociological or historical fact for their film. For me it's the opposite: it's the message of the film fragments themselves that is important and my challenge is to put together a new story.

These home-movie fragments, like the family photo album, are "silent" mementos of the past. They are memory pieces for those who have a direct personal connection to the images, but it is the way in which such images can be shaped together into narrative and given interpretation that transforms them into a wider story with far-reaching significance, beyond the fact that

these scenes or these people actually existed. These historical compositions not only evoke past worlds lost forever to historical events, but, more importantly, show the drama and trauma of history at the personal level. In the same interview, Forgács describes his intention:

> I want to compose something that could be called a private history in front of the curtain of public history. This dynamic relation between the elegy (of private saga) and the structure (of a historical perspective) with Hitchcockian melody is my message.

In most of Forgács's films, "big" history happens off-stage; the spaces where the camera cannot penetrate are those that reveal the violence and circumstance of history, and which Forgács, as director, opens up for interrogation. Bill Nichols (2003), in a discussion with the director, mentions the strategy by which images that seem, at first glance, to be "throw-aways" are placed in such a way that they reverberate with overtones (12).

What thus appears to be footage of a family enjoying a picnic on the banks of Lake Balaton becomes, in Forgács's hands, the scene of a Jewish family enjoying their annual holiday at the very moment that decisions are being made that will change their lives forever. And further, it is not only a Jewish family whose fate is being determined elsewhere, but a pre-Second-World-War, middle-class family of Jewish origin demonstrating their *assimilated* status by their presence at the most popular destination of the urban Hungarian middle class, Lake Balaton, at the moment that racial laws are being designed to strip them of their citizenship. In this way Forgács's work mimics, for me, the core project of the historian, in which the evidence becomes the kernel for new ways of imagining the past. In an article with Anna Davin, Carlo Ginzburg (1980), the "godfather" of microhistory, describes the work of the historian as being like that of the primal hunter whose knowledge

> permitted the leap from apparently insignificant facts, which could be observed, to a complex reality, which—directly at least—could not. And these facts would be ordered by the observer in such a way as to provide a narrative sequence—at its simplest, "someone passed this way." (13)

The early home moviemakers of the interwar era shot the "ephemeral, ambient, pastime nothingness of ordinary life and banalities," as Forgács describes it (Nichols 2003, 3). Strangely, it is precisely these banalities that become captivating. What might otherwise be boring, he explains, "can also be understood as a series of sacred moments: nonhistorical, private footage becomes historic evidence" (MacDonald 2011, 22–3). Forgács intensifies this process of understanding by simple methods such as captioning people's

names on screen as they appear, creating a familiarity with these people that ties the viewer intimately to their stories. Letters, photographs, and other memorabilia of the individuals and their family are also included. To give these stories historical framing, Forgács uses a "captioning" process. Snippets of newsreels, radio broadcasts, songs, titles, or voiceovers that recite dates, names, or other historical data such as laws or regulations, are inserted and juxtaposed with the home-movie footage in elaborate and multilayered sequences of montage.

This has an anchoring effect, in that the home movies and the people whom they represent are relocated in historical time, and it is also deeply unsettling, in that we experience history as a series of jolts. Again and again, the personal realm is not simply enhanced by Forgács's insertions of history, but rather clashes with it. The effect of the collision between personal and historical time is consistently one of shock. As Van Alphen (2011) observes, "the imposition of History on personal time never works smoothly … personal time and Historical time are in radical tension with each other" (60). To take a sample of how this works: György Pető's home-movie footage provides the raw material for *Free Fall* (*Az Örvény*, 1996) and *Class Lot* (*OsztálySORSjegy*, 1997). In *Free Fall*, a wedding filmed by György Pető is taking place in Szeged as a voiceover informs us of a new anti-Semitic law against the copulation of Jews with "native Hungarians." Over footage of Éva, György's wife, joyfully diving into the Tisza for a swim, radio footage broadcasts news of German attacks against the Allies. In another example, at the start of *Class Lot*, which deals with the period 1946–71, György is smiling in front of the camera, his baby daughter Kati in his arms. The date of 1946 has been inserted in a corner of the screen, and a narrator informs the viewer that György has just returned from surviving in a forced Jewish labor unit to discover that his brothers were killed in the camps.

By utilizing aesthetic devices, such as slow motion, freeze framing, or tinting of black and white footage, Forgács slows or punctuates moments, capturing them like a photograph, at the instant of their vanishing. This has the effect of intensifying the mnemonic quality of the original footage: a boy's face in the street, for example, frozen in the instant that he has glanced at the camera, becomes suffused with meaning, as we watch the drumbeats of history roll faster towards war and destruction. We hear the drumbeats, too. The eerie, minimalist music of Forgács's long-time collaborator, the Hungarian composer Tibor Szemző, is a dynamic presence, energizing the silent footage and signposting the subconscious vein of dream and nightmare that threads the internal rhythm of the films. Forgács also occasionally recycles images from his collection and this has the effect, taken over the series as a whole, of demonstrating a historical connectedness between his subjects that extends beyond the individuated private realm.

The meaning of home in *Private Hungary*

It is now over a century since the first cameras for private use appeared on the public market, although the beginning of amateur filmmaking as a phenomenon more properly dates to the 1920s and 1930s, when developments in camera technology led to the first 16mm cine camera and shortly thereafter, the Super 8 (Nicholson 1997, 202). For those who could afford it, home, or amateur, moviemaking became one way of capturing the world in which they lived, a special form of documentation of the private spheres of home and family. Historians have been reluctant to engage with home movies as historical artifacts, perhaps partly to do with the relative newness of the archive and, as Patricia Zimmermann (2007a) argues, their stigmatization as an "irrelevant pastime or [as] nostalgic mementos of the past" (1). Yet home movies are a rich source of evidence for the historian seeking to discover the experiences of the everyday lives of the past, in particular the discourses and practices not found in official or governmental sources, thus mimicking and contributing to the rich store of evidence traditionally used by social historians to explore "history from below." They can reveal much about the author's relationship to his or her surroundings and sense of self. What was filmed (and what wasn't) holds important clues for understanding what was considered significant and worthy of preservation (and what wasn't) within a particular social milieu; what constituted the private and the public, and where these distinctions broke down; and how people chose to represent their social and spatial realities. At its most fundamental level, the home movie can tell us much about the meaning of "home."

Forgács complicates the idea of home as expressed in its various original manifestations: home as geographical space, as emotional space, and as national space. On all of these levels, home is exposed not as an intact and protected place, separate and apart from the official domain of the public sphere, but rather as interconnected and directly shaped by it. In Forgács's hands, the notion of home as safe haven is exposed as a myth, its status of security revealed as an illusion. The private is never free of the public, the family never free of the tyranny of the state, the individual never free of the forces of history. In *Free Fall*, for example, the exuberant life of György Pető, a passionate musician with a love for speedboats, outings on the lake, celebrations with friends, and moments of intimacy with his lover, is depicted as a series of diary pictures, while one by one Hungary's Jewish laws, designed to exclude Jews from civilian and professional life, are recited by a disembodied voice. The overall effect is a collage and collision of banality and brutality, in which the gradual stages of erosion of Hungarian Jewish security is matched by their own valiant and perhaps naïve attempts to go on living

despite it (Portuges 2001, 114). The appearance of normality and even familial bliss depicted in the closed universe of the home movie is in radical tension with the danger and the restrictions tightening around them. There is dignity, and perhaps even something heroic, in these snapshots of people trying to maintain continuity in their lives, of struggling to present a sense of continuity for the camera, in the midst of an increasingly chaotic and irrational universe.

The national home is revealed as a place of uncertainty and, in the final analysis, of exclusion and terror; basic rights of citizenship are stripped away and, with them, the idea of belonging that underpins a sense of place. Balázs Varga (2008) reminds us that the term "private" had particular connotations in postwar Hungary, particularly in the 1950s when "Hungarian Stalinism tried to dig deep into the private sphere, destroying the refuge people could find in private life" (87). It was during this time that almost all privately owned 16mm cameras were confiscated by the State and amateur filmmaking driven underground. In *Class Lot*, Forgács takes the occasion of a three-year-old's birthday party to describe the arrival of the secret police who confiscated the Petős' lottery box earnings from Petős' Lottery, thus destroying the family business, and then seized their apartment and possessions.

An example of how one home moviemaker imagined the geography of home in an earlier prewar time, Jenő used his camera to document Budapest in the 1930s, and the city is inextricably tied to his sense of place (*Dusi és Jenő*, 1989). The beauty of his "beloved Budapest" is captured in its bridges, its art nouveau architecture, its national monuments and its events: the changing of the guard at the Royal Palace, for example, or a Catholic procession. These home movies document a life lived against the changing backdrop of his city; they are the souvenirs of a city dweller and a patriot. A senior clerk of General Mortgage Bank in Budapest, Jenő's footage shows him to be a man with a self-conscious regard for traditional values and conformity. Yet his passion for the cityscape, and his desire to capture its immediacy through the camera, also marks him out as inherently modern. In other films in the *Private Hungary* series, there is a conscious sense of purpose in the desire to capture the newness of the present; possession of a movie camera itself was an iconic expression of a modern identity.

Jenő continued to film throughout the 1940s and to focus on the events and scenes in his city surrounds. Now however, instead of Catholic processions, he films Nazi troop convoys, Jewish forced laborers and Jewish deportations; there are shots of Arrow Cross (the Hungarian Fascist Party) members gathered on street corners or of German soldiers on Gellert Hill. Jenő films the bombing by the Allies, as the smoke rises above the city. In 1945, Budapest lies in ruins, his house a pile of rubble. Throughout, Jenő appears only briefly. He is always an onlooker, never a participant; the footage of his partner, Dusi, reinforces this impression of a solitary man,

for she is always conversing with her dog rather than with him. She dies, not long after the destruction of the city, and the pain of illness inflicted on her gaunt face is visible before we learn, through the narrator, of her death. Soon after, Jenő takes another wife. If there is a common theme that emerges in the widely divergent stories of *Private Hungary*, it is the unpredictability of the future and that change is the guiding force of historical experience.

Through the lens of Jenő's 8mm camera, the idea of home is embodied in the city in which he lives and the woman he loves, both of which are ultimately destroyed, ravaged by war or illness. Erosion is a significant theme in Forgács's treatment of history. The decline of family members and their dead bodies were frequently filmed, as were their funerals; death and dying is integrated equally into stories of "home." In *Notes of a Lady* (*Egy úrinő notesza*, 1994), the passing of time as a state of erosion is presented in a different way. The baroness, whose youth is captured in the original home movies, is taken back to the old home of her prewar marriage and Forgács emphasizes the juxtaposition of past and present, by displaying the present in color, a strong contrast to the grainy black-and-white images of the past. The old baroness walks along the weed-ridden paths, up the crumbling front steps, and examines the door of her old home, decrepit, decaying and boarded up. "A park of 30 acres, 18 rooms," she recalls.

In *Danube Exodus*, home is temporarily defined, for the homeless aboard, within the strict parameters of the boat: men shower together in the open air, pray together, couples dance, fall in love, and marry. In many of these segments, women and children dominate, particularly as men tended to hold the camera in these early days of home moviemaking. There are many occasions where the camera appears to encourage a more performative display of intimacy, in which wives or lovers play up to the camera posing or dancing naked. Jenő's second wife undresses for the camera in the forest; Zoltán Bartos's new wife models for him on an upper floor balcony (*The Bartos Family*). In *Miss Universe*, Marci Tanzer uses his camera almost expressly for the purpose of capturing his cousin's beauty. In *Free Fall*, György films his young wife in the bath, and later getting into bed, beckoning to him coquettishly, yet at the same time with slight annoyance, as if to say "put the camera away and come on!" The viewer is reminded that the act of looking is also voyeuristic. It is never simply neutral.

Home moviemakers used the camera not only as a means of diarizing home and family, but as a way of capturing the secret events of public life; there is covertly filmed footage of people being evicted from their houses and deported; of Jews wearing the yellow star; of streets flying with swastikas; Zoltán Bartos on a holiday with friends in Europe films the sea of Hitler salutes on a railway platform as their train departs (*The Bartos Family*). The engineer

Mr. N in *The Diary of Mr. N* (*N. úr naplója*, 1990) captured a rare glimpse of a Jewish *stetl* in the sub-Carpathian mountains in 1939; interspersed with the footage of his wife Ilona and his growing family are the shots of factory life and brief images of historical significance—the reannexation of upper Hungary in 1939, an attempt to recover part of the territories lost in the Trianon Treaty of 1920. This was also a victory of ultranationalist ideology, an event that Forgács embroiders for the screen with archival footage and the historic speeches of the era.

Lászlo Rátz, second lieutenant of the 18th Regiment of the Second Hungarian Army during the Second World War, took his camera with him to the Soviet Front (*The Land of Nothing*). Rátz's camera enabled him to diarize his wartime experience, to mark both spatial and temporal instants in an infinite landscape of marching and dying. It was also a defense against the anonymity imposed by war. Yet throughout the film, by its very absence, "home" becomes a persistent, imaginary presence. Images of his daughter Zsuzsi, or his wife Teri, flit on and off the screen as Rátz trudges across the Ukrainian landscape. These flashes of home appear as if in a dream, the inner world of the soldier a haunting presence in this utterly foreign landscape of war. This is the key to Forgács's work, what Varga (2008) describes as "making it visible," bringing memories and experiences to the surface that would otherwise "remain in an invisible and meaningless realm" (93).

What Rátz recorded was not the battles, which contemporary audiences have become accustomed to associating with war, but the human moments in between; an encounter with a train of Italian soldiers coming in the opposite direction ("we offered them fine Szekszárd wine"); the departure on the long 1,200 km march across the Ukraine countryside, walking 35 km a day, "pitching tents day by day, get up in the morning and tread on"; marching through villages with names long-since forgotten in the official map of the Second World War: places like Gomel, Nezhin, Baturin, Krolovec, Gaucho, Risk, Ivanoskaya, Lvov, Kursk. Somewhere in Poland or the Ukraine, two young girls on the railway tracks exchange eggs for bread with soldiers on the trains traveling home on leave. Rátz's camera penetrates the private places of war, the quiet spaces: a soldier writing a letter, one lying on the ground reading a book, another rolling a cigarette; the bandaging of war wounds; two officers interviewing prisoners of war captured only moments before. We see battle's aftermath: the bodies lying twisted where they have fallen, flies already swarming, and the silent exhaustion and hungry faces of the survivors. As the 18th Regiment moves across this ruined landscape, Rátz's camera simultaneously records the terrible poverty of its inhabitants, pictures of emaciated farmers pulling their equally emaciated donkeys across barren fields; malnourished children with bloated stomachs; starving dogs; women dressed in rags. These moments thus become the space in which

the emotional and intellectual horror of war, and its banality, is intimately expressed.

The Holocaust and *Private Hungary*

The Holocaust remains one of the most charged areas of historical debate over the possibilities and the limits of representation. From the moment that experience became representation in the immediate aftermath of the war, witnesses, scholars, and survivors asked the question of whether depiction of something as inconceivable as the Holocaust could be possible, or even ethical. Historians have been particularly wary of the representation of the Shoah in art and literature, often with good reason. Hollywood, for example, has tended to fetishize the Holocaust in ways that work against historical understanding, particularly with its desire for happy endings and a sentimentalism that, in the words of Forgács, "covers with tears the dry fact of the existence of the inconceivable" (Nichols 2003, 10). Imre Kertész (2001), who survived Auschwitz to become a writer and Nobel Laureate, writes that in the struggle to make the Holocaust part of western-European consciousness (he tellingly avoids including eastern Europe in this equation), the price has been its stylization, "a stylization which has by now grown to nearly unbearable proportions." The more that is said about the Holocaust, he writes, the more "that its reality—the day to day reality of human extermination—increasingly slips away, out of the realm of the imaginable" (267–8). This is particularly the case, one might argue, with Holocaust documentaries, which have become ubiquitous in today's television programming. Tony Judt (2008) warns of the banality that comes with "overuse": the numbing, desensitizing effect of looking at atrocity images of the Holocaust too many times, so that the horror they describe becomes almost meaningless. The appetite for such images appears insatiable, yet there is no evidence that they assist in historical understanding; in fact, the evidence is that they work against it.

There are no gas chambers, mass graves or cattle cars in the *Private Hungary* films. Instead, Forgács invites us into the heart of the maelstrom, the world of real people who have become familiar to us and for whom there is the capacity for hope, without the possibility of rescue. One of the most striking and masterly examples of this occurs towards the end of *The Maelstrom*. Max has turned the camera on himself, sitting together with his wife Annie and her mother around the kitchen table. What we see is simply a cozy evening scene where the mother and wife sew, and the husband smokes. Somewhere, two young children sleep. It is through the intervention of Forgács that the audience becomes aware of the significance of this scene of deportation to Auschwitz. A voice recites the items each deportee

is allowed to take: a cup, a mug, a pullover, two pairs of socks, two pairs of underwear, two shirts, two blankets, one napkin, one towel.

The possession of historical knowledge transforms us as spectators into participants, in that the act of viewing these fragments also becomes an act of bearing witness. The power that this gives us, the audience, also forces us out of our passivity, as we are called upon to engage in a collaborative act of understanding and interpretation. As Forgács explains:

> It is like the suspense of a Hitchcock film, we know ahead of time that the innocent victim will fall into the hands of the killer. We want to warn him/her; watch out! And our palms are sweating. We can't help, and here—in my films—it anticipates real blood, real suffering, we always have that in mind even if we never see it. (Nichols 2003, 9)

Janika and Marika, the children of György Pető's sister, are visiting their grandmother; Janika says her prayers in bed. The scene is one of domestic serenity and poignancy. Both children, the text on screen informs us, died in a Jewish house in Budapest, their grandmother in Auschwitz. Éva and György's baby boy, born in 1943, died in a concentration camp: we have already grown attached to him through home-movie fragments showing him being bathed, learning to hold himself up on his stomach, smiling for his mother. Forgács repeats the image of the baby boy alongside footage of György, Éva and Kati after the war, to make the invisible visible, the story of loss so effectively hidden or denied in the war's aftermath. In these ways, Forgács goes some way towards resolving the problem of how to approach an understanding of the Holocaust at its core: "unimaginable, unspeakable, and unrepresentable horror" (Huyssen 1995, 259).

Above all, he is calling a Hungarian audience to witness. Forgács began creating his *Private Hungary* in the 1980s, and continued through the 1990s into the twenty-first century; his treatment of the past is at once a product of an emerging European historical consciousness, and a reaction to dominant Hungarian discourses that have downplayed or ignored altogether the question of Jewish Hungarian genocide. As Ivan Sanders (1985) notes, the destruction of Hungarian Jewry was "the most dramatic, the swiftest, the most brutally effective in all of Europe," yet after 1948, "it was considered unnecessary, inappropriate even, to focus specifically on the Jewish question" (191). In the communist reading of history following the Second World War, fascists were, before all things, anti-communists; their enemies were imagined as communists, even if their victims appeared otherwise (Rév 2005, 202).

These films reject the idea of the Holocaust as a closed event. We have become so accustomed to seeing the Holocaust as a narrative end point that there is almost something incomprehensible about the way the camera

keeps recording in the aftermath of such unimaginable loss. Films such as *Class Lot*, *The Bartos Family*, *Miss Universe 1929*, and *I am Von Höfler* show families who, at least partially, survived and went on living in Hungary. Their lives, although terribly ruptured, continued, as did their suffering, persecuted first as Jews, then as capitalists, "[t]hey took away the flat, the villa, confiscated the estate and the agricultural land and the vineyard in 1944 on the grounds that it was Jewish property," recounts Tibor Von Höfler, "and then in 1949, the communists nationalised the villa and the vineyard and left us the agricultural lands which we couldn't cultivate" (*I am Von Höfler*, 2008). In tracing the moments before and after, Forgács reinstates Jewish experience within the parameters of Hungarian history, rather than outside of it. This should not be misinterpreted: there is no doubt that the Holocaust totally destroyed the Yiddish-speaking and deeply religious Jewish communities of rural eastern Europe. But Forgács's films are about the Hungarian middle and upper classes, urban families for whom their Jewishness was often incidental to their sense of Hungarianness.

Finally, as scribe and as historian, Forgács's own narration in his films occasionally reveals contradictions, or shifts in interpretation, that can be traced to wider historiographical developments about the Holocaust in Hungary. In *The Bartos Family*, "the Germans blew up every bridge, 60% of the houses were destroyed, *they* killed 600,000 Jews" (emphasis added). In *Free Fall* however, which came out eight years later, "450,000 Jews were deported to Auschwitz from April 1944 under [the] direction of Eichmann by the Hungarian administration and gendarmerie." A decade later in *Miss Universe 1929*, it is "with close assistance from the Hungarian authorities" that the Nazis murder the home moviemaker Marci's parents and uncles.

It was during this period that historians in Hungary had entered into their own national debate over the question of Hungary's collaboration with Germany during the Holocaust. The debate was prompted by the Hungarian publication of Randolph L. Braham's *The Politics of Genocide*, which appeared seven years after its initial American release in 1981. In it, he questioned whether the Hungarian Holocaust could have been averted, which in turn has led to the question of how much Hungary was responsible for the destruction of Hungarian Jewry. There isn't room here to sufficiently outline the parameters of this debate, suffice to say that, as Forgács's own shifts in interpretation reveal, it is no longer possible to claim that it was simply "the Germans."[5]

Conclusion

Forgács has spoken of the perception he has had, when watching home movies for the first time, of "their past as a presence. It is their past but at the same time it is seemingly present" (Nichols 2003, 5). Elsewhere, he has spoken of their dream-like quality. They possess, visually, an "aura of pastness,"[6] their scratchy, silent, black-and-white pictures a stark contrast to the high definition, Technicolor world of today. They unfold without voices or narrative, and in this sense too are structured like dreams. Home movies are historically characterized by their inherent lack of a traditional plot, their open-endedness; there is usually no "causal chain" between the events recorded.

By locating these pictures in historical time, Forgács transforms what are essentially unstructured and spontaneous takes, the "bits and pieces" of people's lives, into a narrative of wider national meaning, revealing the epic nature of ordinary lives. His films delve into the gaps, the hidden interstices of public and private, of visible and invisible, where historical meaning often resides. They work on two levels, the level of the imagination and the level of interpretation, of emotion and of intellect, and by appealing to both, his films succeed in demonstrating why history matters in contemporary Hungary; in particular, the histories of those whose pasts have long been ignored or denied. The notion of the past as unfinished business is tangible in central Europe. The communist and fascist pasts are the focus of bitter struggles over interpretation, while the Jewish past is still in a state of neglect. In Forgács's films, the legacy of this past is enacted in the form of a social history that makes the individual and the home the locus of historical understanding. They are a unique collaboration of images and the imagination, and, as I have argued here, an astute combination of history, historiography and art.

Notes

1 They form part of Forgács's Private Film and Photo Archive, a collection he has created over the past thirty years, of which there exist roughly 800 hours of home movies and 40 hours of oral history interviews.

2 *The Bartos Family* was inspired by *Private History*, a film made in 1978 by Hungarian filmmakers Gábor Bódy and Péter Timár, who subsequently passed the original Bartos family home movies to Forgács.

3 The *Private Hungary* series: *The Bartos Family* (1988); *Dusi and Jenő* (1988); *Either-Or* (1989); *The Diary of Mr. N* (1990); *D-Film* (1992); *Photographed by László Dudás* (1992); *Bourgeois Dictionary* (1992); *The Notes of a Lady* (1994); *The Land of Nothing* (1996); *Free Fall* (1996); *Class Lot* (1997);

Kádar's Kiss (1997); *A Bibó Reader* (2001); *The Bishop's Garden* (2002); *I am Von Höfler – Variations on Werther* (2008).

4 For a more detailed discussion, see Balázs Varga (2008).

5 For an outline of this debate, see András Kovács (1995).

6 I have taken the phrase "aura of pastness" from Samuels (1994, 359).

15

Necessity Is the Mother of Invention, or Morder's Amateur Toolkit

Dominique Bluher

Joseph Morder is one of the most prolific filmmakers in France. He started filming in 1967 after receiving his first Super 8 camera—a little Instamatic—for his eighteenth birthday, only two years after its release by Eastman Kodak. Since this time, Morder has made over 900 films. The majority has been shot on amateur formats, such as Super 8, 8mm or, more recently, on video and with a camera phone. Morder has also made films in professional formats: in 16mm (originally an alternative for amateur filmmakers but by then a professional format), and last, but not least, on 35mm.

Over the years Morder has created a prodigious body of work. His autobiographical oeuvre is particularly rich. To my knowledge, no other filmmaker has utilized so many forms of personal filmmaking: genuine and fake diaries; portraits of family members and friends; an autobiographical film recounting the painful story of his Jewish family and his childhood in Ecuador; autofictions combining nonfiction with reenactments; fictions adopting the form of a filmed journal or a filmed letter; and autobiographical found-footage films about his early years in South America and his arrival in France. Having written elsewhere on his autobiographical work, I want to focus here on some stylistic features of his Super 8 "fiction-fictions," as Morder likes to call them (Bluher 2006, 216); that is to say, fictions that are not obviously autobiographically inspired.

When Morder started making films, he did not envision becoming a "professional filmmaker"; rather, he imagined himself an amateur filmmaker in the vein of the "Sunday painter" (Bluher 2013, 224). In certain respects, he

has been and always will be an amateur, since in French the word *amateur* has never lost its original meaning derived from the Latin, *amare*, to love.[1] As Morder recalls in the interview published in this collection, when he started making films he made essentially two kinds of movies. At first, he tried to copy the big Hollywood productions that he was fond of (like Douglas Sirk's melodramas or Vincente Minnelli's musicals), and he made adaptations of canonical French novels or short stories (Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes*, Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe*, and Maupassant's *Le Horla*). However, he also shot genuine home movies about his family, friends, holidays, or trips. Morder's passion for the cinema was so strong that more than just a filmmaker, he became a "*filmeur*" as Alain Cavalier put it, long before Cavalier used this expression as the title of his own diary-film: "In my view, Joseph is neither a director, nor a filmmaker or a cineaste. He films like others paint or write, that is to say, since his childhood and every day. He is a 'film-er' [*un filmeur*]" (Author's translation).[2]

The turning point in Morder's career was the selection of *Avrum et Ciporja* (1973) for the first Super 8 program at the Cinémathèque française in 1976. *Avrum et Cipojra* is a little "souvenir film," as Morder calls it, about his maternal grandfather and his second wife who, like his mother, miraculously survived the Holocaust. Morder did not believe that this personal short film could interest a broader public but the screening at the Cinémathèque prompted him to rethink the possibilities of Super 8, and led him to explore its potential in his ensuing Super 8 fiction and nonfiction work. However, even after becoming a professional filmmaker making "real movies" on standard formats, Morder never gave up using amateur formats. He is one of the very few filmmakers who has continued to use non-standard gauges for films then released on 16mm or 35mm, such as *La Maison de Pologne* (1983); *Mémoires d'un Juif tropical* (1986); *L'Arbre mort* (1988); *Romamor. Lettre filmée berlinoise* (1991); *Assoud le buffle* (2002); and *J'aimerais partager le printemps avec quelqu'un* (2007).

At the same time, Morder's approach to amateur filmmaking differs considerably from genuine amateur filmmakers. One need only look at a classic amateur movie instruction manual, such as Kodak's (1950) *How to Make Good Movies*. As Morder recalls, when he first began making films he had been reading a handbook, which might have been Georges Régnier's *Le Cinéma d'amateur* (1969), that explained how to shoot an amateur movie successfully; "how to make a close-up, correct matches, etc." As Morder recalls: "It was very conventional, very academic." He also remembers that he considered joining an amateur film club, but gave up the idea because "the films made in these clubs were hyper-conventional, true imitations of 35mm films without any originality" (Bluher 2013, 225).The advice and instructions in these manuals encourage filmmakers to apply the conventions and "rules"

of traditional Hollywood cinema—or the "institutional mode of representation (IMR)" to use Noël Burch's ([1984] 1990, 186–8) expression—to the amateur film. In these manuals, amateur filmmakers are not urged to explore the stylistic particularities of amateur formats, to misappropriate the figures of conventional filmmaking, or to experiment with their "mistakes," as Morder does, and as he likes to encourage his students to do.

For Morder, necessity is the mother of invention, but accidents breed invention as well. Whereas the amateur moviemaker imagined and targeted by amateur handbooks may be displeased and embarrassed when he or she fails the norm, the avant-garde amateur filmmaker makes virtue out of necessity and out of his or her "mistakes."[3]

Still, it is somehow paradoxical that *Avrum et Cipojra* made Morder think differently about shooting in Super 8, since at a closer look the film corresponds closely to a "well-made" amateur movie with a generic amateur subject, according to the recommendations of amateur film handbooks.[4] The film was fully scripted and Morder had worked out a shooting plan in order to be able to shoot non-chronologically. He directed his grandparents, filmed retakes, used a friend as an assistant, and lit the interiors with spotlights. In order to reenact this typical day of an elderly Polish Jewish couple in the Parisian neighborhood of Belleville, Morder also arranged some events, which in reality do not take place on the same day; for example, while his grandfather goes to the synagogue, his grandmother runs errands at the market. In an interview, Morder admitted to using some techniques to make the film "look pretty," such as "zooms, slow motion, or supposedly artistic soft focus," devices that he came to dislike and to repudiate in his subsequent work (Bluher 2006, 208).

Amateur movie versus home movie

If one follows Roger Odin's (1979) argument concerning the home movie, or the *film de famille* as it is called in French, one might want to differentiate between the "amateur movie" and the "home movie," at least in theoretical terms, because amateur filmmakers, and especially those from the avant-garde, tend to blur the line between these two practices. As Odin explains, "the home movie represents a sub-category of the amateur cinema; and the amateur cinema itself is a subset of the cinema as a whole, in opposition to the professional cinema" (344; author's translation). Odin bases his argument on Pierre Bourdieu's ([1965] 1990) analysis of the social usage of family photography, that is to say its function within the family institution:

> photographic practice only exists and subsists for most of the time by virtue of its family function or rather by the function conferred upon it by

> the family group, namely that of solemnizing and immortalizing the high points of family life, in short, of reinforcing the integration of the family group by reasserting the sense that it has both of itself and of its unity. (19)

Odin argues that the very deficiencies of the family/home movie with respect to the standards of the "institutional mode" of representation (1979, 366) are what make it function within the family institution (Odin 1979, 31; 1995c, 35). He thus enumerates a whole set of stylistic features that can be considered as a "list of gaffes, mistakes and errors which seems to confirm the widely accepted idea that the home movie is bad cinema" (Odin 1995c, 31): lack of closure, spatial and temporal indetermination, narrative crumbling, discontinuity, absence of suture, disregard of matching cuts, looks at the camera, blurs, etc.; and concerning the sound, sudden changes of sound levels, inaudible sequences, camera noises, chopped sentences, or missing sound (Odin 1979, 348–55; 1995c, 28–31). However, since the home movie is meant to be seen by family members, relatives, friends, the presumed audience is nothing like the still and passive spectators in a traditional movie theater; rather, they are participants who have a relationship with the subjects on the screen, and who can and will complete and comment on the projection. The so-called failings function in this mode of reception as a means to create family history collectively, and to reinforce a sense of the family as a group. If we follow this distinction, Morder's *Avrum et Cipojra* is "too well made" to be a home movie as it lacks the eccentric stylistic features of a home movie as described by Odin. Yet this does not mean that the film would not be experienced as a home movie by the members of Morder's family.

Odin's semio-pragmatic approach is complemented effectively by Vivian Sobchack's (1999) phenomenological examination of the home movie. Sobchack bases her argument on the study of the filmic identification by Belgian film theorist Jean-Pierre Meunier (1969), in which he distinguishes three subjective spectatorial modes or engagements with films: the home movie (which Meunier calls *film-souvenir*); the documentary film; and the fiction film. In fiction and documentary films, the spectators are far more dependent on the screen for specific knowledge of what they see than in the *film-souvenir*. The viewers of documentary and fiction films focus their attention *on* the screen objects, in contrast to the *film-souvenir*, where their attention is rather focused *through* the screen objects:

> the images of the *film-souvenir* are not apprehended for themselves, but rather as the catalyst to a primarily constitutive and generalizing activity that transcends their specificity in an attempt to call up and reactivate the "real" and "whole" person or event that is (or was) elsewhere and at some other time … the function of the *film-souvenir* for its viewer is

> incantatory and procurative, and its images are taken up as an intermediary, mnemonic, and channeling device through which the viewer evokes and identifies not with the mimetic image, but with an absent person or past event. (Sobchack 1999, 247)

Although Sobchack argues that the French call the home movie "more aptly" *film-souvenir* (242), this is not really the case. Moreover, this term can lead to some confusion, since in his amateur film handbook Régnier identifies precisely the *film de souvenir* as a typical subgenre of the amateur film. A further distinction is needed between the *film-souvenir* and the *film de souvenir*. In order to be perceived as being in the documentary mode or as an amateur movie in Régnier's sense, the *film-souvenir* would be a home movie that has not been submitted to upstream and downstream treatment (script, storyboard, reenactment, continuity editing, titles, and, in the case of a sound film, voiceover, post-synchronized dialogue, music, sound effects, etc.). This is actually a very substantial shift, which could be rendered in English as souvenir-film (Meunier's *film-souvenir*) versus film-souvenir (Régnier's *film de souvenir*).[5] From this perspective, *Avrum et Cipojra* is a film-souvenir (*film de souvenir*), which also explains, at least partially, the continuously renewed interest in this work: the film is most often perceived not as a home movie, but rather as a documentary. No one who has seen the film can forget the complex reactions that viewing it provokes: our amusement when we first see the elderly couple in bed under their enormous eiderdown, or their Chaplinesque exit at the end of the film; and how our chuckling about the daily routine of this old Jewish couple sticks in our throat when we discover their concentration camp tattoos, revealed by Morder's subtle pans.

Amateur versus "pure" or "naïve" Camp

Amateur movie handbooks like Kodak's *How to Make Good Movies*, or Régnier's *Le Cinéma d'amateur*, give implicit instructions on how to mimic the "institutional mode of representation (IMR)," while Camp movies are known to mock Hollywood cinema. Camp filmmakers like George and Mike Kuchar or Jack Smith are movie lovers, "*amateurs de cinema*," and "*cinéastes amateurs*," cinema amateurs. Morder, for example, shares with George Kuchar a profound admiration for Sirk's flamboyant Technicolor melodramas. Neither Morder nor Kuchar found their ardor for making "Hollywood movies" tempered by their lack of professional means of production. They made their "Hollywood movies" on substandard formats with their "stars" recruited from among friends, neighbors, and family members, and they improvised sets, costumes, props, camera movements, special effects with whatever was at hand, just like a Lévi-Straussian *bricoleur*.[6]

FIGURE 15.1 Avrum et Cipojra: *the tattoo. Screenshot.*

Yet no one has categorized any of Morder's films as Camp, although he himself considers films like *L'Arbre mort* as one of his "Hollywood" or "para-Hollywood" movies (Bluher 2006, 214). Indeed some of the stylistic features of *L'Arbre mort* can be subsumed under the notion of Camp. However, Camp should be specified here in a restricted way, which Sontag (1986) qualifies as "pure" or "naïve" Camp:

> One must distinguish between naïve and deliberate Camp. Pure Camp is always naïve. Camp which knows itself to be Camp ("camping") is usually less satisfying. … In naïve, or pure, Camp, the essential element is seriousness, a seriousness that fails. Of course, not all seriousness that fails can be redeemed as Camp. Only that which has the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve. (282–3)

Here I do not refer to the parodist queer Camp culture that preceded and paralleled the emergence of Camp films, nor to later movies like John Waters's Trash Trilogy with Divine (*Pink Flamingos* [1972], *Female Trouble* [1974], *Desperate Living* [1977]), which propelled Camp to a kind of "film genre." Perhaps nowadays Camp is no longer an adequate term to describe

the attitude that one could discern in naïve or pure Camp films like George and Mike Kuchar's *Pussy on a Hot Tin Roof* (1961), *Sylvia's Promise* (1962), or *Hold Me While I'm Naked* (1966). Contrary to what one has come to associate with Camp, naïve or pure Camp films are not parodies or farces of Hollywood cinema. They do mock Hollywood, but they do not make fun of it. It might be even the reverse. In his interview with Scott MacDonald (1985), George Kuchar explains that none of his films was meant to be a comedy; still, as MacDonald points out, "Kuchar's uses of Hollywood sound and image conventions" tend to create humor, precisely because of "the gap between the high-tech industry product and Kuchar's 'imitations'" (4). In point of fact, pure or naïve Camp movies do not seek to expunge the difference between the Hollywood ideal and the "imperfection" of their films. Thus, pure or naïve Camp movies are at the same time, and in earnest, "too much" and "not enough": "Camp is art that proposes itself seriously, but cannot be taken altogether seriously because it is 'too much'" (Sontag 1986, 284).

Moreover, such films mock art-house and avant-garde cinema as much as Hollywood; thus critic Ken Kelman (1967) justifiably characterizes *Hold Me While I'm Naked* (George Kuchar, 1966) "as a perfect fusion of mock-Hollywood and mock-avant-garde styles" (29). Along the same lines, in his inspired review of *L'Arbre mort* in *Cahiers du cinéma*, the critic and filmmaker Luc Moullet (1993) describes Morder's film "as a Douglas Sirk emended by Michael Snow, or a Borzage revised by Brakhage":

> Morder reintroduced the stigma of the documentary in a hyper-conventional fiction genre; a busted experimentation (parody of the amateur film, slide-show-editing) instead of the professionalism which has always been the trademark of the melodrama; this highly commercial genre is here destined to the underground. (57; author's translation)[7]

I would like to add to this unlikely mélange a comment on the soundtrack, since *L'Arbre mort* can also be considered as a film by Joseph Mankiewicz made in the manner of the films of Jean Rouch. Shot on silent Super 8, *L'Arbre mort* had to be fully post-synchronized. The score for piano by the composer and pianist Mario Litwin evokes the musical accompaniment of silent pictures as well as the musical score of the greatest melodramas. And similar to certain classic Hollywood films from the 1950s to which Morder pays homage, such as Mankiewicz's *Barefoot Contessa* (1954), *L'Arbre mort* includes not only one but several inner voices (over). With respect to the dialogue supposedly taking place on screen, Morder did not aim for perfect synchronism. Not unlike Rouch's *Moi, un noir* (1958), which inspired so much of the early Godard, there is a noticeable discrepancy between the conversations visible on screen and the uttered words, which are not

necessarily spoken by the actor who plays the character. But we would be wrong to consider this approximation as technical shortcoming; it is, rather, an intended effect of the overall aesthetic of the film.

How to make Hollywood movies without Hollywood?

L'Arbre mort takes place in 1950s Latin America. During the first part of the film, a young man, Jaime, returns to an unnamed Latin American country. During the journey on a transatlantic cruise, he meets a slightly older woman named Laura. They enjoy each other's company and come to like each other, but at disembarkation they lose each other in the crowd. Jaime, who has just finished his studies in France, has returned to marry his fiancée and childhood friend, but he keeps delaying the marriage since his thoughts keep turning back to Laura. It appears that Laura has come to this country because she wants to talk with a friend about her parents' death, but secretly she is in search of a friend, a political activist, who has disappeared mysteriously. Jaime and Laura will meet during a grand ball, at the very moment when the government is overthrown by a military coup.

The story of *L'Arbre mort* is supposed to take place in the 1950s in Latin America, but of course Morder did not have the money to film in "real" locations. He had faced similar problems before: for one of his earlier para-Hollywood movies, *La Vie d'une femme, un mélodrame* (1981) which, as the title indicates, tells the whole life of a woman, Morder shot the film during a long weekend, in front of a white wall in his partner's apartment. A Super 8 projector was used as a flood lamp, projecting not only light but also bits of film on the characters. Morder made up for the lack of settings by creating an aesthetics inspired by the Hollywood on-set photography that focuses on the stars while leaving the settings, furniture, etc. in shadow. The period is conjured by the props and costumes, as well as by skillfully designed hair and make-up. Morder also resorted to a whole set of "homemade" special effects, like little paper airplanes or cigarette smoke. The sixth episode of his film-diary, *Le Lapin à deux têtes (Journal filmé 6)* (January–June 1981), includes a kind of "making of," which documents not only the backstage but also the great fun during the shooting.

Another challenge was to create Hollywood camera movement with the minimal means at his disposal: traveling shots without tracks or a dolly, or aerial shots without a crane.[8] In *L'Arbre mort*, he replaced a long reverse-tracking shot with a "slide-show" (Moullet 1993, 57) of some 27 hand-held shots. Keeping approximately the same angle, each shot frames

FIGURE 15.2 L'Arbre mort: *Jaime at the entry of the garden. Screenshot.*

his protagonist from farther away, taking us from a medium closeup of the protagonist's face at a gate to an extreme long shot of Jaime lost at the entry of the garden.

Anatopisms

Now, how to film in contemporary France a film that is supposed to take place in the 1950s in South America? The interiors are less of a challenge, since the right choice of location and props, skillful lighting, and framing can transform a modest apartment into a luxurious residence. But how to deal with the exteriors, since Morder did not have an art department that could have transformed contemporary locations into period sets, nor the budget to have the location cleared, to rent vintage props like cars, chairs for the street cafés, or to hire appropriately dressed extras?

In *L'Arbre mort*, Morder made use of certain images discovered while shooting autobiographical films like *La Maison de Pologne* and *Mémoires d'un Juif tropical*. *La Maison de Pologne* is constructed around two distant and absent countries—Poland, his family's country of origin, and South America, where he was born and spent his childhood. But neither Poland nor Ecuador

is represented directly in the film by images shot in the respective countries. Not filming in Poland was a political decision (General Jaruzelski had declared martial law in December 1981), and Morder didn't have the means to shoot in Ecuador. But when Morder films the snow-covered setting of the Buttes Chaumont in Paris, these images are not spurious since Morder says he truly has the feeling of being physically in Poland. And through his way of looking, the palm trees and buildings in Nice or Paris take the shape and colors of the childhood Ecuador engraved in his memory: "These places and these houses are the most important locations in my existence, since these kinds of façades hold all the images that I will make and that I have made up to now" (*La Maison de Pologne*). In *Mémoires d'un Juif tropical*, which evokes his childhood in South America up to his departure for Paris, reminiscences befog the eyes of the protagonist, and make him see his tropical past in the midst of contemporary Paris.[9]

These spatiotemporal superimpositions are not just ways to supplement the lack of production means, nor simple anachronisms. They are, rather, anatopisms. Anatopism is a neologism of Greek origin, and is the geographic counterpart to anachronism. The French doctor Paul Courbon introduced this term as a psychiatric concept in 1937 in order to describe some psychological problems encountered by a Russian living in France, whose uprooting

FIGURE 15.3 La Maison de Pologne. *Screenshot.*

FIGURE 15.4 Mémoires d'un Juif tropical. *Screenshot.*

and foreignness prevented him from adjusting to his new environment. The concept of anatopism is less used than anachronism, because it most often comprises some anachronistic aspects. But the distinction seems to me important because it sheds light on a phenomenon that Morder discovered while shooting his autobiographical films, and which he reused in his fictional work. Through this superimposition or copresence of two time-spaces—the diegetic universe and the time of the shooting—Morder produces a powerful figuration of the present of the past, or of the survival of the past in the present. In one striking scene in *L'Arbre mort*, Laura wanders all by herself through the streets of the South American/French city. Dressed in a white satin dress, with gloves and a little pearl necklace, her outfit distinguishes her strongly from the cars, the plastic chairs and tables in front of the cafés, the store signage, the merchandise displayed in the shops, and the relaxed summer wear of the customers and passers-by, which are clearly not from the 1950s. In search of the past, Laura passes through the (French) present in a space-time bubble, wrapped in her (Latin American) past.

In his more recent Super 8 fiction, *Assoud le buffle*, Morder has recourse to a similar procedure to figure the far off in the geographical as well as temporal sense. *Assoud le buffle* takes up many recurring themes of Morder's oeuvre: the tropical country of childhood, the Jewish diaspora, the

FIGURE 15.5 *The South American/French city in* L'Arbre mort. *Screenshot.*

walks in Paris during the summer, or journeys through space and time, both literally and figuratively. *Assoud le buffle* is a modern palimpsestic detective movie. Under the eye of an anonymous and omniscient narrator, a private detective called Assoud le buffle finds himself telephoned by a woman and assigned to investigate a certain Louise. As his investigation progresses, he discovers that he is actually shadowing his client. At the same time, reminiscences from his childhood enter his mind, memories of a time when he was living in Shanghai and had a sister since lost; the two threads will eventually merge. One cannot reduce *Assoud le buffle* solely to its plot. Just as Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (*A bout de souffle*, 1960) pays homage, deconstructs, and rewrites the film noir, Morder pays homage, deconstructs, and rewrites the crime movie revisited by *Breathless* (the title *Assoud le buffle* is an anagram of *A bout de souffle*, or more precisely a "contrepèterie," a transposition of the initial sounds, or other parts, of two or more words).

Once again Morder did not have the means to shoot in Shanghai or Pondicherry where Louise grew up, and had to apply with brio his "little method of the filmed journal" to fiction (Bluher 2006, 214).[10] The past is always in a certain way present at our side; thus we can end up in China or India around a (Parisian) street corner. The country of our childhood can re-emerge at the sight of a building, of a body movement, a play of light, a color sparkle, a smile. Morder translates these "madeleines" in stylistic and

narrative patterns, and rather than reviving the past per se, he makes tangible the past in the present.

... some more amateur tools

For Morder, another way to include fancy expensive locations in a no-budget film is to draw on his personal archive, whose images also present the advantage of bearing his stylistic signature. From the beginning Morder has shot multiple films in parallel, and if he is not working on a fiction or a nonfiction film in progress, he is always documenting his life, his trips, and his encounters in his ongoing film diary. *Assoud le buffle* starts and ends with some shots outside and inside a beautiful castle. I happened to be present when Morder filmed this castle, Cerisy-la-Salle in Normandy, which is today an important international cultural center known for hosting conferences. In August 1999, Morder and I attended a conference devoted to the "Je à l'écran." I was giving my very first paper on Morder's work, and he was presenting parts of his diary-films. Morder filmed for his journal the castle, the room he stayed in, as well as an excursion to a beach at Hauteville-sur-Mer, all of which can also been seen in *Assoud le buffle*. This footage intended for his diary migrated into a fiction work, and thus provided for his fiction shots of otherwise rather costly locations.

Assoud le buffle is shot on Kodachrome 40, which was Eastman Kodak's most popular and valued Super 8 film stock before it was discontinued in 2005. Like *L'Arbre mort*, *Assoud le buffle* takes full advantage of the brilliant colors and high contrast of this film stock. Kodachrome 40 is a low-speed color film with superb sharpness and a very fine grain, and it is therefore particularly suited for filming outdoors. In *L'Arbre mort* and *Assoud le buffle*, Morder has created a typical yet glorified Super 8 image; its vibrant saturated colors rival the Technicolor of Sirk's magnificent melodramas, and its depth of field matches the deep focus of Hollywood in the 1940s.

While shooting his diaries, Morder has become a dexterous filmmaker. He knows how to edit in camera, how to pull the trigger rhythmically, and to modulate pace during the recording. In *Assoud le buffle* this results in series of sequences with a striking effect of generalized jump cuts, which can be read as another homage to *Breathless*. Morder varies manually the number and the length of shots, which are furthermore accompanied by small camera movements. His gaze moves in and out like caresses, surrounding the person he is filming. These relatively short shots "jump" to the rhythm of the movement of his arm and his finger, changing angle and distance slightly but visibly. Morder never fixes his Super 8 camera on a tripod, but rather holds it in his hand, sometimes without even looking through the viewfinder. His

camera thus becomes an extension of his hand, his arm, and of his whole body in complete mobility. But unlike the cascades of brief glimpses found in Jonas Mekas's films, Morder's rapid succession of glances does not tend to an abstraction of movements and colors, but instead serves an action represented in its quasi continuity. Otherwise, they could not be considered as jump cuts. The film, however, is not solely composed from these saccadic shots, but they alternate also with quite long sequence-shots that are often filmed with direct sound. This is another strategy taken from his diaries.[11]

The "filmateur"

In conversation with Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze ([1972] 2004) once explained that theory is like a "tool box" meaning that "a theory has to be used, it has to work. And not for itself. If there is no one to use it, starting with the theorist himself who, as soon as he uses it ceases to be a theorist, then a theory is worthless, or its time has not yet arrived. You don't go back to a theory, you make new ones, you have others to make" (208).

Morder is anything but a theorist; the theorist, here, is I, someone who tries to track and to put into words his practice as *filmeur* who, as in Alain Cavalier's already quoted epigraph, "films like others paint or write, that is to say, since his childhood and every day." Morder's love for cinema and desire to make films is so strong, that he also applies his "little method of the filmed journal" to his Super 8 fiction-fictions and his para-Hollywood movies, in which he does and undoes conventional filmmaking. Morder is not only a *filmeur* but also rather a *filmateur*. He invented this portmanteau word to describe himself as a combination "of '*filmer*,' the person who films, and 'amateur.'" And he likes the fact that it can be pronounced like "filmator" as in matador, and thus "resonates with auteur and actor." But "filmator" can also connote the courage, risks, skills, and maneuvers that a torero needs to fight the bull. In short, as Morder said, "it has the potential for all sorts of puns and spoonerisms" (Bluher 2013, 228).

Notes

1 Maya Deren recalls this original meaning in her now classic article, "Amateur versus Professional": "The very classification 'amateur' has an apologetic ring. But that very word—from the Latin 'amateur'—'lover' means one who does something for the love of the thing rather than for economic reasons or necessity" (Deren 1965, 45–6). In his excellent chapter on "The Idea of the Amateur," David E. James (2005) reveals some

intriguing facts, such as that Deren had entered *Meshes of the Afternoon* in the 1945 Amateur Cinema League competition, "where it won an Honorable Mention" (148).

2 These wonderful phrases form the epigraph of Morder's retrospective at the two Parisian movie theaters Le Denfert and Le République in 2000. The title of Cavalier's film was translated as *Filmman*, and premiered in 2005 at the Cannes Film Festival.

3 Jonas Mekas (1962) also emphasized the importance of "mistakes" for the development of a new cinematic language: "even the mistakes, the out-of-focus shots, the shaky shots, the unsure steps, the hesitant movements, the over-exposed and the under-exposed bits, have become part of the new cinema vocabulary, being part of the psychological and visual reality of modern man" (105). As we know, Mekas shot his *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* (1972) with a new but defective Bolex, which could not keep a constant shutter speed thus altering the lighting exposure. But as he writes, since there was no way to fix or lock it, he "decided to accept it and incorporate the defect as one of the stylistic devices, to use the change of light as structural means" (Mekas 1978, 195).

4 Régnier (1969), for example, enumerates in his book the following types of amateur movies: travelogues, reportages, documentaries, romance films or script-based films (11–33).

5 This transformation is somehow reminiscent of the distinction between the diary film and the film-diary, introduced by Jonas Mekas (1978) and deepened by David E. James (James 1992).

6 This being said, Morder recently created for the web-magazine *Blow up*, on the website of the French-German television ARTE, two series of moving and funny autobiographical found-footage videos, in which he realized his dream: to act, dance, and sing like Rita Hayworth, Leslie Caron, Romy Schneider, Clark Gable, Gene Kelly, and Maurice Chevalier, stars that have populated his imagination since his childhood. These found-footage videos could be made thanks to a legal loophole that allowed Morder to work with short clips from big film productions by Minnelli, Sirk, Charles Vidor, and Ernst Marischka. The two series of four short films, "Autobiographies" (2010–11) and "Un Sud-Américain à Paris" (2012), can been streamed on the ARTE TV website: www.arte.tv/fr/3482046.html

7 The French title of Moullet's article, "Le retrait du clou," could be translated into English as "the withdrawal of the nail," which must be understood with Moullet's unique sense of humor as the opposite of "enfoncer le clou," which means "to hammer it in" or "to nail it down."

8 In his text on Marie Menken, Stan Brakhage (1989), who we know as a major advocate of the home movie, gives Menken all the credit for freeing avant-garde filmmakers from their burden to give their camera movements a professional Hollywood look: "Marie's was the most free-floating hand-held camera short of newsreel catastrophe shots; and *Visual Variations on Noguchi* liberated a lot of independent filmmakers from the idea that had been so powerful up to then, that we have to imitate the Hollywood dolly shot, without dollies—that the smooth pan and dolly was the only

acceptable thing. Marie's free, swinging, swooping hand-held pans changed all that, for me and for the whole independent filmmaking world" (38).

9 Mekas (1972) made a similar discovery when he was looking at the footage that would eventually become *Diaries, Notes & Sketches*, also known as *Walden* (1968):

> I kept coming back to the same subjects, the same image or image sources. Like, for example, the snow. There is practically no snow in New York: all my New York notebooks are filled with snow. Or trees … I thought that I was keeping a quite objective diary of my life in New York … It was the opposite from what I originally thought I was doing. … In truth, I am filming my childhood, not New York. It's a fantasy New York–fiction. I was thinking that I was only reacting to the actual reality. I do not have much control over reality at all, and everything is determined by my memory, my past. So that this "direct" filming becomes. (191)

10 For the sequel to *Assoud le buffle, Assoud et les fantômes de la Havane* (2008), however, his production company La vie est belle managed to secure the money for a shoot in Cuba.

11 Morder has experimented with these saccadic shots in film-journals (1979–83), and shot in this manner his zany four-seasons thriller series, *Les Sorties de Charlerine Dupas* (1980–1). An error during the transfer from Super 8 to 35mm accelerated the speed even more; the images originally shot as 18 images per second are now projected 24 images a second. The transfer also altered the soundtrack, speeding up his improvised killer counting rhyme, and making his voice sound like a high-pitched, cartoon-like one—"errors" that suit perfectly the comic effect of the films.

16

Joseph Morder, the "Filmateur": An Interview with Joseph Morder

Dominique Bluher

FIGURE 16.1 *Joseph Morder. Photo by Jorge Carrasco.*

Dominique Bluher: I would like to devote this interview to the notion of the "amateur," not only because it is particularly meaningful with respect to your work, but also because in French the word "amateur" does not only mean a hobbyist, but also a person who is passionate about something, a lover and a connoisseur. You started as a nonprofessional, amateur filmmaker.

Joseph Morder: Yes, when I started filming, I couldn't imagine that one day I would become a professional filmmaker. I thought I would continue all my life to make films as an amateur, that I would have a profession and make films on the side, like a Sunday painter. I wanted to make films, but at that time cinema meant Hollywood. It was an Olympus, for Gods, inaccessible.

DB: You received your first Super 8 camera in 1967 as a birthday gift. It wasn't a common gift at that time. Who gave it to you?

JM: My mother. She must have heard me speak a lot about wanting to make films. It was in the mid-1960s, when Super 8 was commercialized. I remember dreaming in front of the advertisements for the Super 8 camera. The ads said that for this price you can get a camera, a projector, and a screen. The marvel of marvels!

My mother offered me my first camera for my eighteenth birthday. It was rare to receive a gift like that, but it wasn't a luxury either. My first camera was the simplest and the cheapest model, a Kodak Instamatic that must have cost around 200 francs in 1967. Not so long ago, I found a camera like my first one, and filmed it in *J'aimerais partager le printemps avec quelqu'un* (2007).

DB: What kind of films did you make with your first camera?

JM: When I started making films, I made two kinds of movies. On the one hand, I copied the big Hollywood productions I saw at the cinema: the melodramas by Douglas Sirk, the musicals by Vincente Minnelli, war films by Samuel Fuller and Raoul Walsh, or westerns by John Ford. I also saw a lot of popular Mexican films. When I was living in Ecuador I also wrote novels inspired by radionovelas. These stories were not written for the screen, but they were very concise and scripted—they were based on dialogues. They were very descriptive, as well as very aural and visual. I also drew a lot, and wrote and drew several graphic novels.

I started by making adaptations of literary works that had impressed me, like *Le Horla* by Maupassant, *Le Grand Meaulnes* by Alain-Fournier, *Adolphe* by Benjamin Constant, or *Lucien Leuwen* by Stendhal, which has become my "livre de chevet,"[1] one of my favorites. Since I had little means, I had to concentrate the stories into a couple of minutes, like the films at the beginning of cinema. On the other hand, I made home movies—I filmed my holidays, trips, family, friends, and school. But it was only after one or two years of filming that I realized that putting them together would create a kind of film diary.

DB: Did shooting in Super 8 make you discover other possible subjects to film?

JM: This was much later. At the beginning I shot in Super 8 while waiting to be able to shoot on 35mm. I tried out things; I even thought about joining an amateur club. However, the films made in these clubs were hyper-conventional, true imitations of 35mm films without any originality. I even read a book about how to shoot films. I remember a book that explained how to make a closeup, correct matches, etc. It was very conventional, very academic. After having made films on Super 8 for ten years, the turn came the day I met Joël Valls. Valls had spoken with Henri Langlois, the director of the Cinémathèque française, about organizing a screening of Super 8 films at the Cinémathèque. Langlois thought that Super 8 was the future of cinema, and had given Valls *carte blanche*. This was in the 1970s, when Super 8 had become the support for all kind of movements born out of May 1968: regional, homosexual, feminist. The films were shown at the first Super 8 festivals in Paris, where I discovered these films. I was stunned by what they were daring to do. I didn't dare [do] one-eleventh of what they did. I admired them, but continued to make my little academic movies.

It was around that time that Valls asked me to show him my films. Of course I showed him the work that I considered important, that is to say the adaptations. He stayed inscrutable, no reaction: they weren't his cup of tea. So I mentioned also that I was keeping a film diary, and that I had made some films on my family, and in particular one on my grandparents, *Avrum et Cipojira* (1973). He wanted to see it, and this was the film he wanted to program. I couldn't understand why this film would be of any interest. It was a private film, a true home movie, with zooms, unfocused shots, etc.— everything I have tried to avoid ever since.

But when the film was shown in 1976 on the big screen at the Palais de Chaillot, in front of a packed house, I came to realize its effect on the audience. Not because it is a home movie as such, but because of this scene with my grandfather and my grandmother (actually not my real grandmother who died in the concentration camp, but his second wife). He is reading the newspaper, and she is washing the dishes. I pan on their arms, and there is their deportation number, the camp tattoo. The people were struck. First you see a very ordinary couple, elderly people in their everyday life. They have quite some faces. I also filmed their bodies. They were funny, people were laughing, but when all of a sudden they discover the tattoos, the room fell completely silent.

This is when I understood that this film is not just a home movie to be seen by the family. And from this screening on, from Valls's selection on, I started to think differently about shooting in Super 8. I had made films from the four or five books I cherished, but from then on, I shot only my original scripts. Even if there was still another novel by Maupassant I was thinking of,

it was no longer necessary. *Avrum et Cipojira* is a turning point; this is why I call it my "primitive film." It was not at all my first film, but this film made me think about the particular peculiar language of Super 8. Everything I made afterward was shot respecting its specific, peculiar format, Super 8, 16mm and, many years later, 35mm.

DB: How would you describe the specificities of filming in Super 8?

JM: That is very complex question. But first of all it means freedom, an absolute freedom. What is wonderful with Super 8 is that you can shoot at any moment. You do not have to call your team. If in the middle of the night you see the moon, a big, enormous, magnificent, beautiful moon, you get up, you take your camera, and you film it. You can do it in video, too. Still there is a difference. In Super 8 you film immediately—at the same time you think of it. The problem with video and the digital is the shutter lag that delays the beginning of the shot.

Super 8 has this immediacy, but it has also a delay, since it takes about a week to get the film processed, which creates a distance between the moment you shoot and the moment you see the footage. With video you don't look with your eye, you look at this small display. Another difference with other formats is that I always shoot my own films in Super 8, whereas with the other formats I work with a cameraman or camerawoman.

Filming in Super 8 also means a tactile contact with the material. And you can edit in the camera, which you can't do with other formats, not even in 16mm, since there is always a flash frame at the beginning of each take that needs to be cut away at the editing table. With Super 8, you can make a single image, a subliminal image, 24 or 18 frames per second depending on the shooting speed. You film with your finger, it is very manual, and requires dexterity. When I succeed in making a single image, I am very happy, because I know it is very rare. It is my caviar, my nirvana.

Another term as important as freedom and availability is constraint. Freedom is born out of constraints. When I teach workshops, which are today in video and no longer in Super 8, I still require for the first film [that it be] the length of a Super 8 cartridge, that is approximately 3 minutes, and they have to edit the film in the camera—no editing table, no editing after the fact. Nor are they are allowed to "erase" a take, which you can do in video, but not in Super 8. If they think that they have "failed" a shot, they can't erase it, but have to make a shot that would "justify" the "failed shot." Actually, I hope that they make mistakes because you learn from your mistakes, from your errors. We all make errors. This is how I shot my journal, since it is edited in the camera. But when I started I didn't think of all that. I don't think you should think but make. Reflection comes afterwards.

DB: Since the 1990s all your major short and feature films have been shot in 16mm, video, or even in 35mm. However *Assoud le buffle* (2002) returned your fiction films to Super 8 from your early years.

JM: *Assoud le buffle* is a deliberately amateur movie between several professional movies. I had just finished three very "produced" films, with real production companies, all made in one year. I wanted to make a movie without any production structure and outside the production system, without asking anybody anything. I made it out of my pocket, but with the intention to have the film postproduced by a production company, and that eventually everybody would get paid. I wanted to find the state of mind of the amateur, asking friends to come the next day to film if they felt like it, since there was no other contract than a moral one. It was a difficult period in my life. My mother was very sick; it was a film that I was making to relax.

It wasn't particularly expensive. I bought Super 8 cartridges, the actors weren't paid, but I bought them food and drink. I kept the receipts, however, hoping that I would be reimbursed, and this was what happened once the film was finished. *Assoud le buffle* was shot in three months, without a script or storyboard, contrary to the produced films. We had only a basic outline of the plot and of the characters. The script was written during the editing process, which lasted several months, like a classic regular production. With my production company, La vie est belle, we applied for and received some funds with which the film was finalized: the editing, mixing, color correction, recording of the voiceover, and finally the enlargement to a 35mm print. Paradoxically, the sequel, *Assoud et les fantômes de la Havane* (2008), was scripted, but for practical reasons, because we had to apply for funding in order to be able to shoot the film in Cuba. You never make something twice.

Assoud also returned to my earlier way of filming. Like my short, *Charlerine Dupas* (1979–81), which is composed of some 1,200 shots and lasts around three minutes, *Assoud* is heavily edited, as are in fact all of my Super 8 films. And like my feature, *L'Arbre mort* (1988), it combines very fragmented sequences with long takes and sequence shots. I try to structure and create a harmonious balance between these two extremes. The challenge is how to tell a story with so many quick shots without tiring the spectators.

DB: Not so long ago you told me that you are a "filmateur." What do you mean by that?

JM: Right [laugh]. Wasn't I joking during a conversation with you, when I came up with this word? It is a combination, a portmanteau word of "filmer," the

person who films, and "amateur." I like the way it sounds. You can pronounce it "filmator" like a matador, and it resonates with auteur and actor. And it has the potential for all sorts of puns and spoonerisms.

Note

1 Bedside book.

17

Working at Home: *Tarnation*, Amateur Authorship, and Self-Inscription in the Digital Age

Laura Rascaroli

> I have worked alone and at home, on films of seemingly *no* commercial value… "at home" with a medium I love, making films I care for as surely as I have as a father cared for my children. As these home movies have come to be valued, have grown into a public life, I, as the maker of them, have come to be called a "professional," an "artist," and an "amateur." Of those terms, the last one—"amateur"—is the one I am truly most honored by… even tho' it is most often used in criticism of the work I have done by those who don't understand it. (Brakhage 1982, 162; emphasis original)

The foregrounding of the self and the prominence accorded to subjectivity are veritable markers of the contemporary globalized culture and society. Gestures of autobiography, autoethnography, and self-representation are to be found right at the heart of artistic practices, products of popular culture, and online forms of expression and communication. While a surge of interest in autobiography can be detected at least since the 1970s, the tendency to foreground the self is today ubiquitous, and is simultaneously facilitated and fashioned by new digital technologies and platforms.[1] From online video self-exhibition, to experimental art, to first-person nonfiction film, to interactive environments, to collaborative digital projects and beyond, new technologies are affording both artists and amateurs the means to express and represent

themselves in ways that seem radically novel. To reflect on this phenomenon means to confront a pervasive autoethnographic urge that, starting from a focus on the subject, invariably opens up to the world, in response to the social and relational nature of the "I," and to the essential embeddedness of the person in his or her environment. It also means to interrogate the self that is becoming represented through the new digital artistic forms, media, and channels of performance and communication. Finally, it implies querying our understanding of authorship in the digital era, as well as the nexus amateur/auteur in the context of the current proliferation of self-portraits and autobiographical performances facilitated and shaped by the digital turn. These issues will be at the heart of my inquiry in this chapter.

The cine camera has been a relatively (and increasingly) widespread apparatus for the fashioning of narratives of the self and for personal and familial memorialization ever since the introduction of 9.5mm film on the amateur market in the early 1920s. The availability of video cameras to amateurs since the late 1980s further popularized the medium and made it ever more accessible as a means of self-representation. However, the inexpensiveness and ease of production, manipulation, and distribution now offered by digital platforms constitutes a revolution that is having profound and still amply uncharted effects on issues of filmic authorship, self-fashioning, and self-representation. These platforms are at once technologies of production and technologies of the self, to use Michel Foucault's (1988) terminology. In Foucault's understanding, technologies of production "permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things" and technologies of the self "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (18). Digital platforms are evidently both: they are tools for the production and manipulation of audiovisual products, and they facilitate operations of self-fashioning. As such, they imply "certain modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes" (18). These transformations and modifications of skills and attitudes impact on the ways in which we think of self-portrayal and of authorship. Of course, the same could be said of previous technologies; however, what is especially noticeable, and interesting in respect of the topic of this volume, is the way in which digital platforms are facilitating the authorial expression and self-expression of amateurs by giving them access to inexpensive technologies of production and postproduction that are characterized by high professional standards. Quality of the image aside, "[d]esktop editing platforms … constitute the first ever attempt to make editing capabilities accessible at the nonprofessional level in the history

of audiovisual media at large" (Fox 2004, 14). In addition, the Internet is a door that directly connects one's desktop to the world, providing a first-hand route to sharing, exhibiting, and distributing content. In this new technological context, then, what is becoming of the distinction between amateur and professional? More explicitly, to use the words of Broderick Fox (2004), "[w]ith the present digital revolution poised to make every desktop computer a potential site for film/video editing, web and CD/DVD-ROM design, and routes of alternative distribution, are traditional amateur/professional divides being blurred, or rendered obsolete?" (5).

The relationship between the terms "amateur" and "professional" has been examined frequently, both by scholars (Zimmermann 1995) and by prominent artists (Deren 1965), whose work has thrown into sharp relief the ambiguities and ideological implications of the distinction between the two figures and categories. A key text from this point of view is "In Defense of Amateur," first published in 1971, in which Stan Brakhage (1982), from his position as a key figure of experimental and avant-garde film, subverts customary ways of understanding the term and suggests that the filmmaker who works not for money, fame or power but "according to his own necessity" (163) is "'at home' anywhere he works" (164). This formula suggests defining as amateur the practice of working at home, in the environment that is most intimate and familiar, and where the self is most at ease—Brakhage talks explicitly of his "living-, therefore working-room" (168). Simultaneously, the expression defines a way of bringing the same attitude and practice into the world, as clarified by a subsequent sentence: "I carry a camera (usually 8mm) with me on almost every trip away from the house" (168). This definition of home moviemaking describes a practice that is transformative, in the sense that it both redefines the house as a place of work, and makes of the world a home. While Brakhage used 8- and 16mm technology in his home-moviemaking practice, the new platforms for viewing, sharing, editing, and manipulating audiovisual content maximize the home's potential to be a veritable workspace, a professional space. At the same time, the highly portable digital cameras, cell phones, and tablets of today make it possible to capture the world easily at any time and under most conditions, thus making it more available, within reach, and familiar: one's "home" is now in one's pocket. This certainly amounts to a transformation of both skills and attitudes. Digital technology is revolutionizing our ways of doing things—and of thinking, feeling, remembering, imagining.

A new understanding of, and approach to, self-representation is part of this transformation. The production of the personal webpage or website, the personalized use of social media platforms, the confessional video, the blog, and videoblog are some of the technologies of the self that are today available to an extensive and growing (though geopolitically inflected) section of the

world population. The omnipresence of videos and screens, the ubiquity of popular culture, and the all-pervasiveness of security cameras, satellite views, and live web cams point simultaneously to a screen-saturated environment, to an increasingly globalized culture characterized by time-space compression, and to what thinkers including Jean Baudrillard (1994) and Fredric Jameson (1991) have described as the growing mediation, fragmentation, and derealization of experience. The subject simultaneously foregrounds him- or herself and is foregrounded; both viewing and viewed, he or she willingly records him- or herself and is the unwitting object of others' recordings and surveillance. While self-representations continue to offer the promise of finding a meaning and order in the haphazard flow of human experience, thus granting unity to the self, the technologies that now shape them seem to deny that unity, for they tend towards fragmentation, recuperation, reiteration, accumulation, alteration, stacking, updating, morphing, airbrushing, photoshopping. It is thus possible to begin to isolate some tendencies of self-inscription that are shaped by digital technologies of the self: narcissism (the omnipresence of the "I," the confessional mode, the customization and personalization); hybridism (the merger, the palimpsest, the contamination of genres and languages); fragmentation (the aesthetic of the fragment, the clip, the conciseness of online textuality); instability (the mutability, updatability, manipulability of digital products).

One of the most sensational cases of an entirely homemade digital film to become commercially distributed, and successfully so, Jonathan Caouette's *Tarnation* (2003), is an exceptionally fertile case study to bring to bear on the present reflection. Both its textual and extratextual features make of it a key instance of the phenomena described above. The fruit of long labor, first presented in its current form at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival, *Tarnation* was Caouette's debut—though he had been making amateur films and home movies since he was eleven. The film is based on, and incorporates, old Super 8 and contemporary digital video footage, which Caouette first edited on an Apple computer with iMovie software, but which was eventually printed and distributed on 35mm. *Tarnation* was widely presented as one of the most inexpensive films ever to be made, for a mere $218.32, which was spent on videotapes and materials, although its cost grew significantly (to about $400,000) when copyright had to be cleared for the soundtrack in preparation for general theatrical release (Youngs 2004). Its worldwide box office returns, on the other hand, have been calculated at $1,162,014.[2] After its screening at Sundance, *Tarnation*—which was taken up by Gus Van Sant and John Cameron Mitchell as executive producers—was welcomed by audiences and critics alike, won a number of prizes at international festivals and, virtually overnight, became a myth of DIY moviemaking. Attempts at categorizing it are destined to fail—*Tarnation* at once incorporates, refers

to, and borrows from the home movie, the video diary, the autobiographical documentary, the experimental film, the audiovisual confession, the video letter, the rock opera, and the music video, while not fully embracing any of these forms. *Tarnation* is a hybrid, unstable, fragmented, and narcissistic text, which seems to epitomize all the tendencies of digital self-inscription. It is also an autoethnographic, experimental, imperfect, homemade film, in which the lines between amateur and auteur become deeply blurred. Hence, an examination of *Tarnation* will result in a commentary on the issues that are at stake in this chapter.

In both reviews and promotional literature, *Tarnation* has most frequently been presented and described as a documentary on Caouette's mother, Renee LeBlanc. After falling from a roof at 12 years of age, Renee, then a Texas beauty queen and local model, became temporarily paralyzed; in the absence of physical wounds, she was eventually hospitalized to receive several courses of electroshock over two years. Having subsequently been abandoned by Jonathan's father, she moved to Chicago where, penniless, she was raped on the street, in the presence of her little boy. *Tarnation* is also a personal documentary; we learn that Jonathan was taken from Renee, who was deemed unfit to care for him, and placed in foster homes, where

FIGURE 17.1 *Jonathan Caouette's* Tarnation: *sensory overload and fragmentation of the image. Screenshot.*

he himself suffered abuse. At 7 years of age, he was taken in by his grandparents. His turbulent adolescence was marked by suicide attempts and, since the age of 11, the making of amateur films, videos and home movies. After embracing his homosexuality, Jonathan found some stability with a supportive lover; at 31 he returned to Texas, after discovering that his beloved mother suffered brain damage from a lithium overdose. The rest of the story is in the present, and shows Jonathan's attempts at taking care of Renee while also looking for answers on their troubled past from his mother, his father, and his grandfather.

The biographical impulse is evident in *Tarnation*; yet, I argue that the narrative order that the biographical storyline tries to impose on the magma of the audiovisual material, especially in the first hour of the film, is almost completely vanquished.

Entirely confined to the written word, thanks to a high number of captions appearing either on a black screen or superimposed on the footage, the biographical narrative of Renee's life is made up of dates and facts. The ostensible order and precision of the information is, however, disrupted and undermined by the visual track, which is radically antinarrative as well as overwhelmingly excessive (I will return to the issue of excess later in the chapter). There are very few narrative sequences in the film and almost none is devoid of strong postproduction intervention. Most of the visuals are made up of a devastatingly rapid montage of photographs, fragments of home movies (filmed in Hi8 video, Super 8, Betamax, VHS, and mini DV), excerpts of fiction films and TV programs. Images are reflected, mirrored, decomposed, fractured, iterated, multiplied, split—resulting in a kaleidoscope that ultimately defies any attempt at achieving narrative order and biographical completeness. The soundtrack further contributes to undermining meaning, offering a bewildering mix of aural stimuli, from rock music, and pop songs to recordings of phone calls, snippets of conversations, monologues, noises. Distortion is the aesthetic form that dominates the film, thanks to sound mixing and digital postproduction intervention, as well as to Jonathan's foregrounding of dressing up, staging, role-play, and performance in his amateur films. Rather than a coherent and complete life's story, we gather from the film the impression, at most, of biography as medical anamnesis.[3]

While the biographical focus on Renee and her history of mental-health problems is certainly substantial, it is also heavily disrupted, not least by the profusion of images of the director himself, from childhood to adulthood. Throughout the film, Jonathan Caouette never stops looking intentionally, inquisitively, narcissistically into the lens, studying his own reflection, and repeatedly performing for the camera.

Caouette is present in *Tarnation* through still and moving images of himself, from both the past and the present; through the narration, which, while often

FIGURE 17.2 *The camera as a mirror. Screenshot.*

being in the third person (the captions refer to Caouette as "Jonathan"), overtly talks about the director's own life, experiences, problems, fears, and dreams; through his gaze, staring from behind the camera at his interviewees and social actors; through his voice, which we hear addressing people while filming them; and finally, I would argue, through a vivid authorial presence and authorial "stamp" on the film.

When discussing the three ways in which an autoethnographer can inscribe him- or herself in film—namely as speaker (the voiceover), as seer (the origin of the gaze), and as seen (the body image)—Catherine Russell (1999) adds a fourth discursive possibility:

> that of the avant-garde filmmaker as collagist and editor. This is perhaps the surrealist heritage of the form, the role of juxtaposition, irony, and *rétrouvé*, through which the film- or videomaker "writes" an identity in temporal structures. By inscribing themselves on the level of the "metadiscourse," film- and videomakers also identify with their technologies of representation. With a culture of independent filmmaking, alongside their other discursive identities. (277–8)

This fourth discursive possibility of self-inscription is thoroughly evident and clearly foregrounded in *Tarnation*, and I will debate it further below, on

account of its centrality to the issue of authorship. First, however, it is useful to note that Russell's argument about videomakers' identification with their technologies of representation resonates with Anna Poletti's (2012) claims, made in relation to *Tarnation*, that "autobiographical acts which use multiple media require autobiography scholars to expand our methods of reading to include attention to the communication and representation of the historical, social and semiotic conditions of identity and selfhood which exceed narrative representation" (158). What Poletti persuasively argues is that *Tarnation*'s overabundance of video footage, especially from popular screen culture, "produces an excess within the relational narrative of *Tarnation* which points to the potential of the video camera to function as a means of experimenting with the tropes of popular culture for the structuring of affect and the exploration of identity" (159). I have already mentioned that *Tarnation*'s biographical narrative is characterized by excess; in what follows, I will pay renewed attention to the film's excess, though not focusing on the structures of feeling associated with popular culture, as Poletti has done, but on other areas of the film that, I argue, comment on the type of self that is inscribed in digital video today, and on autoethnographic authorship after the digital turn.

Recuperation, collage and the split self

The question of authorship in the digital age is often interrogated from the point of view of its features as "dispersed, collaborative, and unstable" (Friedlander 2008: 179). The Internet, in particular, has facilitated forms of authorship that are shared, multiple, at times anonymous, and that are not temporally delimited and geographically anchored. While made possible and shaped by digital tools, however, the authorship that emerges from *Tarnation* is still individual and clearly identifiable; yet, it is also unstable and, from a certain perspective, disputed. It is strong because the film is fully associated with Caouette as both the source and object of the enunciation: the identification of *Tarnation* with its author is total, as is suggested by the visibility that the filmmaker has acquired upon the distribution of his film, and by his centrality to all critical discussions of it. The instability, on the other hand, becomes evident in the gradual, progressive construction of the text, which went through several phases: a process of ongoing construction facilitated by the technological ease of editing and reediting film at home, on a computer. The controversial aspect is linked to the eternal debate on the amateur, professional divide, and on the opportunity of defining amateur, homemade products as authorial. While the professionalism of technologies available to the public increases, so much so that we witness the rise of the new figure of the "amateur professional" (Leadbeater and Miller 2004),

the amateur continues to be widely characterized in negative ways, as "not sophisticated, not technically adept, not pretty or polished, not of popular interest, or perhaps most frequently and opaquely, 'not professional'" (Fox 2004, 5). If many critics welcomed Caouette's first film as a veritable artistic achievement, and compared it, for instance, to the likes of Kenneth Anger (Gleiberman 2004), Stan Brakhage, George Kuchar, and the early John Waters (Romney 2005, 78), all reviewers placed emphasis on *Tarnation*'s DIY features. The negative criticism, then, barely concealed the age-old judgment on the amateur's lack of professionalism. Some reviewers spoke of faults such as the overabundant explanatory captions, or the film's music-video style, or the "clumsiness" with which the material is treated (Lennox-Boyd 2005); others plainly accused it of being amateurish: "it feels as if it was thrown together, that an amateur was looking for ways to learn about new gadgets" (Gordon 2004). These critiques, however, are off the point, because what is gripping about this text is precisely its homemade edge, its DIY feel. This, I argue, can be identified as an *excess*—as something that exceeds our expectations of a biographical or autobiographical narrative, of a documentary, and of a "professional" text. Furthermore, they are off the mark because what we could call *Tarnation*'s "amateur excess" is also what pushes it into the realm of the avant-garde and of the experimental film; it is the zone in which the amateur meets/becomes the auteur. Finally, because the excess of the text is also the excess of the self—it is precisely in this surplus that the self becomes manifested, as I will argue more in detail below.

These intersecting issues can be elucidated by returning to Russell's idea of the autoethnographer's self-inscription in his or her film as avant-garde filmmaker, seen as both collagist and editor. Russell, as we have seen, points to "the surrealist heritage of the form, the role of juxtaposition, irony, and *retrouvé*." These elements are very evident in *Tarnation*, which is best described as a collage of images, fragments of texts, and diverse footage, as well as a whirlwind montage of the same. The surrealist heritage is therefore clearly relevant to *Tarnation.* However, rather than in the irony motivating the recuperation and collage of images, I want to explore this heritage in the destabilization of the subject and of the self.

Elsewhere, I have argued for a reading of *Tarnation* as a self-portrait of Jonathan Caouette, rather than as autobiography, or even as a biography of Renee (Rascaroli 2009b). More precisely, I proposed to look at *Tarnation* as a "self-portrait with others," a well-established tradition in the fine arts, which reflects the idea that the self is profoundly relational and that we are only identified in relation to other people.

Tarnation is also a composite self-portrait in time, as it contains images of the artist from childhood to maturity; this is a time-honored tradition in the

FIGURE 17.3 *Portrait with others: Jonathan and Renee. Screenshot.*

fine arts, with many artists producing self-portraits at different moments of their lives. These two features of the fine-arts self-portrait, relationality and temporality, are key to *Tarnation*. They are also typical of the home movie, in fact: as a technology for the representation of the family, the home movie acquires significance precisely from its ability to record not discrete moments in time, but the family's evolution, with much focus usually being placed on the children's growth, from birth to adulthood.

Tarnation does contain a narrative, albeit a destructured one, and thus shares something also with the literary self-portrait, which is a much more subjective, poetic and unstructured form than autobiography. For Michel Beaujour (1991), author of a seminal text on the genre, the lack of continuous narrative is, indeed, a defining characteristic of the literary self-portrait:

> This genre attempts to create coherence through a system of cross-references, anaphoras, superimpositions, or correspondences among homologous and substitutable elements, in such a way as to give the appearance of discontinuity, of anachronistic juxtaposition, or montage, as opposed to the syntagmatics of a narration, no matter how scrambled, since the scrambling of a narrative always tempts the reader to "reconstruct" its chronology. (3)

This description closely evokes filmic language, and can indeed be easily adapted to the description of filmic self-portraits, as Raymond Bellour (1989) has done in his analysis of self-representation in video and film: "The self-portrait clings to the analogical, the metaphorical, the poetic, far more than to the narrative. Its coherence lies in a system of remembrances, afterthoughts, superimpositions, correspondences. It thus takes on the appearance of discontinuity, of anachronistic juxtaposition, of montage" (8–9). What is striking in these descriptions of the self-portrait (literary and audiovisual) is that they present clear similarities with the language of dreams, as defined within a Freudian model. Substitution, juxtaposition, and superimposition are Freudian operations of the unconscious, dreaming mind that the cinematic apparatus is well able to perform, through framing and camera movements and, especially, through montage. The correspondences between the language of the self-portrait, of dreams and of film are particularly relevant to *Tarnation*, for they are the nexus of Caouette's authorial expression and of his self-representation. It is here that, I argue, the surrealist heritage can be felt in *Tarnation*—in a self-inscription that is collaged and recuperative, dream-like and fragmented.

Tarnation is, indeed, an intensely oneiric text. There are many overt references to dreams in the film. After the opening titles, for instance, Jonathan is woken up by his partner, and says to him: "I was having the weirdest dream. It was about my mother. Is it raining?" he asks—prompting us to interpret in the light of his dream not only the opening sequence (during which rain was seen falling over the title screen), but also the ensuing, long section of the film devoted to his mother's past. Later, over images of dark clouds, a voice whispers: "Wake up angel, wake up, my darling." A caption then informs us that at 12 years of age Jonathan smoked two joints which, unknown to him, had been laced with formaldehyde and PCP; ever since, he has suffered from depersonalization, a condition that makes him feel as if he lived in a dream. We subsequently find out that, at 14, Jonathan began to have a recurrent dream about "a tall blond boy, a grown-up version of the Little Prince"—evidently a narcissistic figure of the self. We are later told of another narcissistic dream, in which Jonathan is reunited with his long-lost father, who tells him that, had he been aware of Jonathan's existence, he would have attempted to find him. It is also relevant that, when describing his experience of watching his own film at the 57th Cannes Film Festival, where it screened in the prestigious Un Certain Regard section, Caouette made recourse to a dream metaphor: "I felt like Diana Ross in the last scene of *Mahogany* or *Lady Sings the Blues*. It was so surreal and such an out-of-body experience. It felt like a flash was going to go off and everything was going to freeze frame and credits were going to roll and I was going to wake up from some elongated dream that I've been having" (quoted in Youngs 2004).[4]

There is, however, much more dream to *Tarnation* than this series of textual and extratexual references. The heavy postproduction work on image and sound—especially the fragmentation, repetition, mirroring, slow motion, acceleration, superimposition, and alteration—is intensely dream-like and, in fact, nightmarish. Jonathan's predilection for punk rock, underground cinema, horror and slasher, and gore contributes to the effect. But the main reason for the nightmarish impression is the representation of a split personality—a representation of the self that is deeply surreal. The Surrealist movement was chiefly concerned with the question of identity—the Surrealists' exploration of dream and of the unconscious mind resulted in questioning the principle of a unitary self, and in embracing instead the notion of a divided, fragmented, dissolved, convulsive self, of a subject haunted by otherness and instability. Ideas pertaining to the rupture of ego boundaries and becoming "other" are at the core of important Surrealist self-portraits such as those by Miró (Lomas 2000, 187–213). Elza Adamowich (1997) has described a self-portrait by Max Ernst, which he used as an invitation to his 1935 Paris exhibition, with words that could apply equally well to *Tarnation*: "by exploding the mimetic claims of photography, fragmenting the face, and displacing the visual by the verbal, Ernst foregrounds the (self-)portrait as an artefact, presenting identity as a construct—split, fragmented, held together by writing—bringing together irreconcilable fragments in the manner of collage" (32).

Caouette's self in *Tarnation* is most certainly represented as split. Reflecting himself in the mirror of his mother, he repeated her troubled youth, personally ventured into the territory of her mental instability, and finally ended up exchanging roles with Renee and mothering her. As if the duality were not clear enough, in a final video confession Jonathan explains: "She lives inside me, she's under my skin," and then dares uttering his ultimate fear: "I don't ever want to turn out like my mother, and I am scared!" Jonathan's condition, depersonalization, is described as the feeling of dissociation from one's self, of observing oneself from the outside, as if in a dream. This condition is not in contradiction with the act of self-portraiture; after all, any artist effects dissociation when creating a self-portrait. Indeed, "the self-portraitist's inaugural experience is one of emptiness, of absence onto himself," or, to use Antonin Artaud's definition, that of an actor observing his own motionless body in a mirror (quoted in Beaujour 1991, 4). Performance is at the core of Jonathan's self-presentation. The scission between author and actor is the first element of the film that suggests a surreal "vision from the outside." It is through the exaggerated performance of oneself that the artist explores the ability of filmic self-portraiture to foreground the "I" as other to itself.[5] Such extrinsic vision is strengthened by the author's performance as a disembodied and voiceless narrator, who exclusively expresses himself through written captions and who adopts the point of view of an outsider (as already mentioned, the

narrator speaks of Jonathan in the third person). In the first, more decidedly dream-like section of the film, then, the overabundance of captions discloses the narrator's lack of control over his own story, over his own self. While the film's second section is more rational, the nightmarish vision of a split self tends on occasion to re-emerge. In place of the fragmented self-observation and self-absorption that characterized the first hour of the film, in the last 30 minutes Caouette uses the camera in a more traditional manner, employing the familiar format of the interview, of the home movie and of the personal documentary to try to extract truthful answers—from his mother, who no longer can give them, as she is now brain-damaged; from his grandfather, whom Jonathan mercilessly interrogates; and from himself, through a masochistic video-confession. The image of Caouette that emerges from the last section of the film is less that of a regressive, narcissist dreamer, who is at once the director, actor and spectator of his own dream/film, and more that of a grown-up self, who seeks answers, but also knows how to take action and solve problems. The oneiric self-absorption is, however, always close at hand. It powerfully returns, for instance, when, during the grandfather's interrogation, as if prompted by the tangibility of the man's and of Renee's madness, the film suddenly halts; the image literally burns and melts before our eyes, giving rise to a last, intensely and frighteningly nightmarish vision of the self.

Tarnation and the digital amateur/auteur

My reading of *Tarnation* has placed emphasis on the film's collaged, recuperative, fragmented representation of the self that is facilitated and shaped by digital tools. Such representation, I've argued, is the nexus between the figures of the amateur and of the auteur today; one in which the tendencies to narcissism, hybridism, fragmentation and instability typical of digital self-representation meet with the autoethnographer's self-inscription in his or her film as avant-garde collagist and editor. In this sense, as in Russell's proposition, the digital videomaker truly identifies with his or her technology of representation—while also professionalizing his or her home and turning it into a veritable workspace.

That *Tarnation* should be seen as an exemplary, key text for an understanding of self-representation and of amateur authorship in the digital age is confirmed by the critical storm it sparked off at its release, first at Sundance and then at Cannes; but also by the fact that, in a sense, the film has soon become obsolete. When asked whether such response could be repeated if the film were to be released today, Caouette rightly doubted it:

> If a film like *Tarnation* were made now, and it were made exactly—let's say hypothetically, stylistically, aesthetically the exact same way that it was made in 2004, with the barrage of text on screen, with the music and the imagery, and all those kinds of devices that were used. If that were to happen in 2012, … I don't know if it would have made the same sort of impact, necessarily. (Mournian 2012)[6]

In 2004, *Tarnation* perfectly prophesied and captured the astounding effects of a true mutation of skills and attitudes instigated by digital home moviemaking as a new technology of the self; that mutation has now taken place, and it simply and fully informs our digital culture. As a result, the traditional amateur/professional divide has become profoundly blurred; today's amateur still works at home, but has access to quasi-professional tools and to channels of distribution and self-promotion that were once inaccessible.

Notes

1 In the first half of the 1970s, literary studies witnessed a flourishing of publications on autobiography and self-reflexive narrative structures, including those by Jean Starobinski (1970), James Olney (1972), and Philippe Lejeune (1975).

2 http://www.the-numbers.com/movies/2004/TARNT.php

3 For instance, one learns from Caouette's personal webpages that in 2004 he had a ten-year-old child—not only is there no trace of the child in the film, but not even of the notion of Jonathan's bisexuality. See http://jonathancaouette.blogspot.com/ and http://www.myspace.com/jonathancaouette

4 In 2010 Caouette released a short, *All Flowers in Time*, starring indie-film queen Chloë Sevigny, which could be described as a Lynchian nightmare. Introducing himself on the short's official website, Caouette explains: "I consider all my films, both fiction and documentary, to be in a sense 'true' stories of dreams" ("Jonathan Caouette").

5 On the relevance of the same argument to performance in photographic self-portraiture, see Amelia Jones (2002).

6 Perhaps as a consequence of his understanding of the impossibility of repeating *Tarnation*'s extraordinary impact, for its sequel, *Walk Away Renee* (2011), Caouette chose a *vérité* documentary style.

PART FIVE

New Directions: The Digital Age

18

Saving Private Reels: Archival Practices and Digital Memories (Formerly Known as Home Movies) in the Digital Age

Susan Aasman

From its invention in the nineteenth century, film fulfilled the wish to record and preserve historical time. Cinema seemed to provide the perfect instrument for making a record of fleeting moments, of time itself. This "archival desire"—as Mary Ann Doane (2002, 22) terms it in her book *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*—has been especially strong in the way that amateur filmmaking was marketed and practiced in the private domain. Home moviemaking blossomed during the greater part of the twentieth century as a new cultural memory practice, but it took some time before this kind of private document entered public archives. Only at the end of the twentieth century did home movies become a rich treasure ground in public archives and public history, and "saving private reels" in local, regional, and national audiovisual archives became common practice.[1] But when it comes to more recent digital amateur media practices, like user-generated content, how should we approach saving these "private reels"? What kind of records are they? An important consideration is how historians and archivists should evaluate the transformation of amateur film into "user-generated content" when it comes to assessing it as both historical source and private record. As we are entering an age that has seen a vast increase in the number of

home videos produced using an array of digital devices, questions about the art of appraisal and selection, of preservation and cataloging, and all other traditional archival practices, have become particularly pertinent. The increased availability of online sources does not displace the need to engage with issues of preservation, as some scholars suggest. Some argue that in a networked culture file sharing can be seen as a new kind of storage model (Snickars 2010, 304). Every document that is uploaded on the Internet will at least be shared with someone, expanding its possibilities for survival. Yet, I would argue that such a *laissez-faire* approach is problematic and that further consideration should be given to recent shifts in memory-recording practices and in memory-archiving practices. Such an analysis is crucial because, as Jacques Derrida (1995) reminds us in *Archive Fever*, archives are not about the past: they are about the future.

Archival paradigms

Since the 1990s, there has been an explosion of academic interest in the archive, with the emergence of a new field called "archival science," which has developed a reflection on its own archival practices. According to Canadian archivist Terry Cook (2001), one of the main theorists of the field, it was not just postmodernism but also new technologies like the computer that fueled the interest in posing questions on the purpose of archives and the nature of records. As he notes, Derrida's *Archive Fever* stimulated a growing stream of articles that emphasized the idea of the document and thus also of the archive as something cultural and constructed, deeply influenced by power relations (8). New ideas have developed about records as something that work less as factual documents and more as signs, as signifiers, and thus as a mediated and ever-changing construction. These ideas have influenced archival conceptions and methodologies so much that a fundamental shift has taken place within archival science (Cook 2001, 10). Within this new, postmodern paradigm, according to Cook, archives serve society and not the other way around; documents are no longer passive objects locked away but active agents that continue to play a role in society.

In a much more comprehensive historical overview, Cook (2012) reconstructs and analyzes not only the postmodern paradigm shift but also four successive archival frameworks covering the last 150 years, each of which represents some fundamental changes in the perception of archival practices and concepts. He suggests that archives come from a tradition that was deeply rooted in the nineteenth century, which favored the concept of the archive as related to the state—an institution of power. Within this premodern archiving mindset, the work of the archivist functions as the "guardianship

of Truth" (106) and records are, strictly speaking, equal to judicial evidence. In this period, private records were not part of the archival tradition, let alone non-textual records like film. Around the 1930s, Cook argues, there slowly emerged a new, modern paradigm that represented a more historical perspective on the nature of records. In line with historiographical developments, such as the rise of the concept of "history from below," archives felt the need to collect other kinds of documents. More than in the previous period, records "of the lives of people in factories, farms, and families, rather than those primarily of the famous and the influential," as well as private collections, were regarded as worth saving (108). According to Cook, "memory" was the key concept of this paradigm that lasted until the 1970s, when the postmodern paradigm slowly emerged.

By connecting the third paradigm to postmodernism, Cook emphasizes a significant change in attitudes towards universal truth and objective knowledge, and thus towards the document. Documents are no longer perceived as innocent, raw material, and the perception of the archive and archival practices has also shifted. Thus, in this period the archives reflect, more than before, society "in all its pluralism, diversity and contingent nature" (Cook 2012, 110). This means that, more than ever before, questions of which documents might be considered worthy of preservation, and which might not, need to be examined. As the Dutch archivist Eric Ketelaar (1997) has noted, "archives are now … of the people, for the people, even by the people" (quoted in Cook 2001, 18). Allied to this more "democratic" spirit is the relatively new concept that archives might also collect documents about the inner life of people. This has ultimately led to a whole new dynamic concept of what an archive could or should be: namely, an archive now makes itself responsible for safekeeping our culture and identity "and personal and collective memory" (Cook 2001, 18).

Film and video archives

Although Cook (2012) acknowledges the profound influence of technologies of record making, he does not take into account the advent of audiovisual records and how these affected archival practices over the years. His focus is mainly on the transition from paper to electronic documents and how this has stimulated new ways of thinking about the document as something more transient and fluid. This, in turn, undermines previous archival practices that were tied to more traditional documents (16).

It is interesting to speculate on how self-evident the notion of saving film reels was within different moments of archival history. As noted, until well into the twentieth century the emphasis in archiving was on textual

records: films were mostly absent. In his 2004 UNESCO report, "Audiovisual Archiving: Philosophy and Principles," film archivist Ray Edmondson admits that film archiving "had no formal beginning" (26). As he notes, it gradually "emerged from diffuse sources," yet for a large part of the twentieth century the historical value of film was all but ignored (26). In the early years of cinema it was, according to Edmondson, "by no means self-evident that sound recordings and motion pictures had any enduring value at all" (26). The fact that film was not a traditional text troubled archivists and made them reluctant to collect such material. There were some sporadic initiatives, even as early as 1898, when the Polish cinematographer Bolesław Matuszewski (1974) first published his plead for a "Depository of Historical Cinematography" that could archive important film reels. In his pamphlet, he called for legislation so that film would have the same legitimacy as other archival documents, but he knew that it would take a while: "I have no illusion that my project will be rapidly implemented" (quoted in Kula 1995, 210). Matuszewski was proven right as it took some time before the worth of film was truly appreciated. As film archivist Sam Kula notes (1983), most archivists and librarians ignored the new medium and regarded film as "vulgar entertainment" (7).

Gradually, a certain awareness emerged, perceptions changed, and there were more initiatives to save film reels. For example, in 1919 a number of Dutch historians pleaded for a film archive to store films that had as their subject matter the social, cultural, and historical life of the Netherlands. They succeeded in their efforts, and that same year the Dutch Central Film Archive was established. More important internationally was the foundation of professional organizations such as The International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) in Paris 1938, which aimed at bringing together a variety of institutions (including the Cinémathèque française) dedicated to rescuing and preserving films, both as cultural heritage and as historical documents. Five decades later there came a movement of professional film archivists who were convinced of the record value of moving images and, finally, in 1980, UNESCO adopted a "Recommendation for the Safeguarding and Preservation of Moving Images."

From the point of view of Cook's framework, this rather slow process of recognition is quite logical, for moving-image documentation "seldom can be categorized as functional or evidentiary with relation to the activities of an institution," as Kula (1983, 20) has argued. Only the postmodern paradigm's emphasis on identity explains why the 1980 UNESCO report could open with the following considerations:

> **Considering** that moving images are an expression of the cultural identity of peoples, and because of their educational, cultural, artistic, scientific and historical value, form an integral part of a nation's cultural heritage,

> **Considering** that moving images constitute new forms of expression, particularly characteristic of present-day society, whereby an important and ever-increasing part of contemporary culture is manifested,
>
> **Considering** that moving images also provide a fundamental means of recording the unfolding of events and, as such, constitute important and often unique testimonies, of a new dimension, to the history, way of life and culture of peoples and to the evolution of the universe. (Emphasis in original)

With the terms identity, expression and testimonies, film seems to fit the need for the contemporary longing for records that give access to history. Questions around the archiving of audiovisual records were again raised when television came to be considered, as noted by James Billington of the Library of Congress in Washington D.C: "Television affects our lives from birth to death … Sadly, we have not yet sought to preserve this powerful medium in anything like a serious or systematic manner" (quoted in Murphy 1997). The quotation is from a report on the then current state of the preservation of American television and film that was issued in 1997 by the Library, in which it was acknowledged, after extended consultation with institutions, that television and video heritage was at risk. Yet the preservation of television programs and images on videotapes has proven to be both a blessing and a curse, as Murphy (1997) suggests. During the second half of the century videotape reached a level of dissemination that film never enjoyed. According to Murphy:

> [T]he use of the film camera or projector was always a special event. Film never achieved the ubiquity of videotape, the ever-present ability to record almost every facet of our society in a fixed and tangible form, cheaply and conveniently if one desired.

As a result, an important part of our postwar history has been archived on videotape, but at the same time, as Murphy points out, videotape was never engineered to be a permanent record, and for a long time no professional society recognized it as a permanent recording medium. Even when important events or programs were taped, they were sometimes erased because the tape was needed again and reused. So, a lack of historical awareness, technological limitations, and commercial practices have meant that the idea of preserving television has been delayed. However, as television acquired longevity, its history became recorded both in small and local and in large corporate and public television archives through special preservation programs.

Looking back, it is easy to see that for too long the cultural and historical significance of television had been underestimated. Lynn Spigel (2010)

has suggested that it was the "ephemeral quality of television," namely as "a product of its status as signal rather than a physical object" that made archives reluctant to preserve it ("to give it material form") (56). The idea of television representing collective memory developed rather slowly, and only benefitted from full professional preservation programs from the late 1990s. Then, the idea of building a national archive that could house traces of the national audiovisual history quickly spread worldwide.

Archiving home movies and home videos

How do we situate the archiving of home movies and home videos within these archival transitions? From its very early start, the home movie developed as a private archival practice itself; amateur cameras were marketed as a social and cultural tool with which everyone could easily record future memories. Making a home movie became almost a holy duty that coincided with a very strong domestic ideology in the twentieth century: as a "ritual of domestic happiness" (Aasman 2004, 8–9; author's translation), every family should buy and use a camera in order to celebrate family life. The mass production of such consumer technology enabled a considerable quantity of amateur users: now everyone could build a family archive.

However, it took a long time before these films became collectible items for the archive. For such a transformation from the private to the public to happen, people had to be willing to hand over their personal material, and archives, in turn, had to be willing to accept intimate images that may not directly represent public historical events. In fact, home movie archives evolved gradually, perhaps as part of the influence of the new social history. Patricia Zimmermann (2007a), one of the first and most important historians in this field, refers to this influence when she states that: "History from below raises questions about the nature of evidence, conceptual models and methodology" (3). Zimmermann quotes Hayden White, who has observed: "I think the problem now, at the end of the twentieth century, is how we re-imagine history outside of the categories that we inherited from the nineteenth century" (16). As Zimmermann notes, historians introduced new questions that moved the debate beyond the traditional historiography and resulted in a growing willingness to accept new source material like the home movie, now regarded as new "unexplored evidence" (3).

Although Zimmermann (1995) signaled as early as the mid-1990s that amateur film had thus far belonged to "the garbage dump of film and cultural studies" (xv), the growing appreciation of home movies as archival documents gathered some momentum in that period. The home movie truly fitted Cook's postmodern paradigm of archives open to material that

had a more plural, diverse, and contingent nature. In both Europe and the United States, local, regional, and national archives gradually moved beyond collecting only professional film. To raise archivists and scholars' attention, a group consisting of film and television directors, archivists and scholars founded the Association Européenne Inédits in 1991. Its main goal was to stimulate projects and activities concerned with the research and preservation of, and access to, amateur film heritage. Today, it encourages the development of centers, archives, and other bodies responsible for such activities in all European regions. In the United States "orphan film" became the term used for neglected archival films that were previously thought of as unprofitable or unimportant. Academic interest in alternative media resources and in orphan films stimulated the founding by the U.S. Congress of the National Film Preservation Foundation in 1997, as well as academic-archival gatherings under the flag of a yearly "Orphan Film Symposium" organized by its founder, Dan Streible (Zimmermann 2007a; Streible 2007). Some years later, in 1999, the Association of Moving Image Archivists established a "Small Gauge Task Force" in order to define selection criteria and develop plans for the preservation of amateur film.

Home movies have become a rich archival source that have found their place in museum exhibitions, found-footage filmmaking, and historical documentaries. They have acquired educational, historical, and also economic value. They have also acquired something else: namely, material quality. Since the 1990s, at the time when large-scale digitization processes started to turn many film archives into digital archives, the small-gauge celluloid images acquired a nostalgic look. The rich colors of old Kodak 8mm movies and the somewhat naïve flickers of black-and-white 9.5mm footage had what Edmondson (2004) calls "artifact value" (4). As he notes, not only do the family images from a bygone age affect the viewer, but also the material traces of the celluloid medium itself, such as faded colors or scratches, serve to produce a specific kind of historical valorization, a stamp of authenticity. As Joseph Auner (2000) has remarked, "old technologies and machines figure in a search for authenticity" that new machines lack. To illustrate his point Auner describes how, in advertisements, grainy home movies with washed-out colors are used to evoke a sense of the past. In an era when the world is accessible through a computer screen, private reels have become physical objects; things that are tangible, that can be (and should be) kept and protected (see Petersen 2012).

The material quality or artifact value now associated with amateur film was not immediately extended to video and it took some time before home video was granted the same status as home-movie reels, illustrating one of the dangers associated with regarding film as an object rather than a practice. As Zimmermann (2007a) has cautioned, archivists and historians must move

beyond thinking in terms of collecting objects, towards an understanding of home moviemaking as a "multiplication of practices, technologies, discourses and representations" (275). Analysis of the rise of analogue video from about 1976, with the introduction of VHS camcorders (and other similar formats) until well into the 1990s when digital video replaced analogue video formats, has been neglected both in academic research and in archival work. Indeed, many film and television archives have been reluctant to collect VHS video footage produced by amateurs. This is not only because video has proven to be more vulnerable and less durable than celluloid, but also because other characteristics, such as the long duration of a VHS tape, makes the whole archival process of selection, description, and cataloguing a much more complex activity. The failure to collect it, as Murphy (1997) has noted, means that there is "a heritage at risk." Yet, more recently, there has been a shift towards reconsidering this amateur format with the Scottish Screen Archive initiating a project to locate amateur videomakers active between 1980–2000 and to preserve and research their work.[2] In the Netherlands, an ongoing collaboration between the national audiovisual archive and three regional archives aims to collect home movies on videotape.[3]

Private reels 2.0: Digital memories

By exploring the complex interrelationship between technology, generations of users of specific technologies, and spaces or places of cultural-memory production in both home moviemaking and screening, it will be possible to understand the evolution of practices and rituals of memory-making. Despite the so-called "analogue response" (Petersen, 2012) that has seen hobbyists returning to 35mm photo cameras, 8mm film cameras, and even VHS cameras, this nostalgia move seems rather marginal, especially considering the omnipresence of new technology as the basis of home-made communication practices. Contemporary home moviemaking on celluloid or videotapes seems an antiquarian practice, for the practice of home moviemaking has always been dynamic and transforming. From celluloid to video to digital, from storing to sending, from keeping to sharing, from projecting on the white screen to watching the television set to looking at our cell phones, production and screening practices have been ever evolving. Yet in this contemporary digital age the question remains: can we still think in terms of the traditional discourse of home movie or home-video practice given the overwhelming rise of social media practices? Can we compare a YouTube video with other older practices of home moviemaking?

Certainly, technological changes have influenced existing conventions of production and reception. Instead of a stand-alone camera we use a variety

of recording devices, including communication devices with which it has become easier to produce, and cheaper to store, images. The context of reception has also changed: it is no longer necessary to be in the same room to watch a video together, if this is shared online. On multiple platforms, family members can view images simultaneously while being physically apart. It is fascinating to see how fast new technologies and possibilities are embraced and become embedded in our daily life, transforming from something novel into routinized practices. If we want to understand these new social and cultural practices, we must avoid focusing on home movie and videomaking as a fixed medium and embrace a more plural concept of domestic media technologies (see Aasman 2012). As David Morley (2000) suggests, we need to decenter the media in order to understand how media processes and everyday life are interwoven; we need to look at them as "media ensembles" (200).

Andrew Hoskins (2011) takes this idea even further; he sees a strong "technology = human memory theory equation" that is part of an age wherein media are "pervasive, accessible, disposable, distributed promiscuous[ly]" (19). Or, in the words of Bernard Stiegler (2009), "I can read myself, listen to myself, see myself and download my own work, and all of this makes for a very strange circuit: … a kind of short circuit of my own memory" (41). According to Hoskins (2011), we are in the middle of a connective turn; a fundamental shift that is related to a society dominated by media networks and media content: "the connective turn includes the enveloping of the everyday in real-time or near-instantaneous communications, including 'messaging', be these peer-to-peer, one-to-many, or more complex and diffused connections" (20). Many of these actions are home moviemaking in a new way: they produce what we now call digital memories. Just like home-movie practices, these new media practices all share the basic function of keeping a record of our lives.

Looking for a new archival paradigm: Saving digital memories

The idea of a single object or even single practice has evaporated. The media has become a holistic mix of technologies and techniques (see Hoskins 2011). The emergence of digital memory practices on a mass scale brings about a set of new archival questions because many of these virtual practices are, as William Uricchio (2009) has noted, "beyond familiar objects … [as] they are examples of networked and collaborative cultural production … multiply voiced, collective, and ongoing"—in the sense of not finished (137). So, if we

do acknowledge the importance of patterns of interaction, we should value them as being as important in the final text and try to find new ways of saving them.

Can we keep dynamic artifacts in the archive just like we store reels or videotapes? Cultural knowledge and assumptions of archiving are grounded in traditional objects, and these objects risk becoming outdated as more collaborative cultural productions demand preservation. Still, outside of the institutional archives new archival practices have emerged. Internet archivist Rick Prelinger (2009) points to YouTube as a possible new way of understanding today's digital archive. Even though YouTube has only been in existence since 2005, it has become in the eyes of the public "the default online moving-image archive" (269). Prelinger's essay, in fact, argues "that YouTube might as well be an archive; that in the public mind it is not simply an archive but an ideal form of archive; and that it problematizes and threatens the canonical missions of established moving-image archives throughout the world" (268).

Whether YouTube really is an archive is an assertion that must be interrogated. What are the characteristics of such an archive, one that seems able to accept new kinds of evidence and establish new practices of collecting, curating, and accessing? Even before the advent of YouTube, the end of the 1990s saw a shift in archival sciences due to the need to acknowledge fundamental changes in archival practices. Archivist Michael Lynch noted in 1999 how "the recent proliferation of electronic means for reproducing and disseminating documents and entire archives has begun to disrupt the traditional exclusiveness of scholarly access" (75). Lynch was writing about the age of electronic media that brought about new forms of "popular archives" (65), by which he primarily referred to television documents. He also anticipated a massive proliferation of documents and records as part of the growth of the Internet: even before Web 2.0, he warned against a surplus of material, which could ultimately become a sort of "archive cancer" (81) or "a break-out of archival information from a contained, coherent and centrally administered corpus" (81).

According to YouTube's own statistics, every minute 60 hours of video are uploaded on the popular site. This means that in just one month the amount of video production surpasses what ABC, CBS, and NBC as the three major American television networks have produced in sixty years.[4] Some estimate that 80 percent of this content is user-generated material.[5] Every community, but also every human, can become an archivist, making his/her/its material accessible online. In the age of the Internet, some welcome or, conversely, fear the prospect of the "total archive" that is able to document every human experience with a richness that was never before attainable (see Cook 2012). The problem could be, then, that there will be too much evidence, too many

records, and too much memory. As Cook notes, we need a new approach, a new archival paradigm for coping with this situation and for thinking about the archive as a practice, moving beyond traditional ideas of localized, institutional archives. Cook (2012) calls it the "community paradigm" (19), based on the concept of a democratized archive that embraces new methods of participatory and collaborative archival work. These new digital archives are unlimited resources open to anyone who desires to store, access, reuse, and reproduce documents, including his or her own digital memories.

Parallel to this unprecedented proliferation of documents, new ways of thinking about the archival value of all kinds of documents are emerging. In turn, a vibrant debate has started on the idea of the archive itself. As Mike Featherstone (2006) has noted: "Increasingly the boundaries between the archive and everyday life become blurred through digital recording and storage technologies" (591). The terms that we use to describe this new kind of archive are endless, but all acknowledge that archives are no longer stable institutions. The emphasis is on immateriality, instability, fluidity, dynamism, lack of hierarchy, and plurality. The new archives are being reconceptualized as living archives, global media archives, popular archives, fluid archives, archives without walls, or simply databases.[6] Many of these new terms point to the fact that a major shift is taking place towards archiving the everyday and the personal through self-appointed "do-it-yourself" archivists building emotional archives, ego archives or personal archives. It is easy to conclude with Cook (2012) that the result is a flourishing of the archive in the digital age:

> especially one where citizens have a new agency and a new voice, and where they leave through digital social media all kinds of new and potentially exciting, and potentially archival, traces of human life … to which trace we as archivists, historians, researchers of all kinds, have rarely had such sustained access before. (5)

Home movies, or home videos, or digital memories, are right at the center of this development. One hundred years after their invention, home movies have become a rich resource for historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and media scholars. Without doubt, the idea of saving private reels in a public archive has taken some time to emerge and to become established, contingent on a growing appreciation of *reels* as historical documents, and then a gradual acceptance of *private reels* as documents. The call for saving those private reels has brought about a sense of urgency: amateur reels have become important documents and objects representing the past on different levels, both as imagery and as artifact. Home movies that were once thought of as too ephemeral, everyday or ordinary are now appreciated

for just those same reasons: because they give us traces of human life. But what is even more fascinating is that home moviemaking has evolved from a rather traditional ritual film practice into a much more pluralistic memory practice. We need to rethink this transformation also in terms of saving these records. Neither the fear of loss of information nor that of its overabundance and overload should keep us from addressing the question of saving digital memories, formerly known as home movies.

Notes

1. *Saving Private Reels: Presentation, Appropriation and Re-contextualisation of the Amateur Moving Image* was an international conference held at University College Cork in 2010, and at which most of the research included in this volume was first presented.
2. For more see "Children and Amateur Media in Scotland," http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/cca/research/theatrefilmandtelevision/projectsandnetworks/cams/
3. For more see "Amateurfilm Platform," http://www.beeldengeluid.nl/amateurfilm
4. http://www.youtube.com/t/press_statistics
5. http://mediatedcultures.net/smatterings/youtube-statistics/
6. See Patricia Zimmermann's chapter on "The Home Movie Archive Live" in this volume.

19

The Home Movie Archive Live

Patricia R. Zimmermann

Overture

The live music, multimedia, spoken-word project, *Memescapes* (U.S.A. 2007), produced by Ann Michel and Phil Wilde in collaboration with the Human Studies Film Archives (HSFA) of the Smithsonian Institution, was a special commission of the Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival in Ithaca, New York.[1]

Memescapes explored the notion of a meme, a concept that moves, migrates, and changes as it travels through different bodies and spaces. Within an original post-rock, post-minimalist score by electronic violinist and composer Judy Hyman, the project digitally manipulated amateur films from Asia, Latin America, Europe, and Africa, slowing down the images and repeating them to echo the repetition in the music. Actress Cynthia Henderson performed a spoken-word script describing four memes—soundscaping, panic, metropolis, maps.

A suite in four parts, the section titled "Soundscaping" featured a complex, layered sound design by a second composer, Robby Aceto. A closeup of a wooden water wheel from an amateur film shot in Cambodia in the late 1960s, before the ravages of the Khmer Rouge, was slowed down to more than half its original speed, and repeated. The wooden wheel acted as a dreamscape of daily life in pre-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, a visual condensation of Buddhism, water, and wheels. The repetitive, sensuous electronic music, combined with analogue violin and banjo, conjured a trance state in which to contemplate amateur film and history.

Conjuring live performance as a dialectic between the present of the layered electronic music and the past of amateur film, *Memescapes* provokes

an epistemological question: "What happens when the home movie archive goes live?"

The question of the "live" and cinema lurks in the origins of cinema exhibition. Many detailed histories of silent film and music have analyzed their kinetic, responsive, interactive relationships (Altman 2004; Hubbert 2011). Now, "live" encompasses both similar and different functions. It revitalizes public exhibition—in museums, universities, film festivals, and theaters—and has increased audiences for difficult, obscure works. Classical music venues like Carnegie Hall can sell out demanding contemporary music concerts when artists like Bill Morrison do projections for experimental composers like Michael Gordon.[2] Groups such as Alloy Orchestra, who perform original live music for classic silent films, sell out art houses and festival venues.[3]

Home movies are often positioned as dead, inert, ghostly, decayed. This chapter proposes an opposite, almost counterintuitive move towards "live": alive, to live, lively, enliven, living. This advocacy to venture into the "home movie archive live" neither discounts nor trivializes decades of important scholarly work analyzing home movies as texts, historical evidence, indexes of trauma, marginalized social and political histories, economic relations, or as elements of documentary, experimental, and narrative films.[4] Rather, this chapter ponders how the home movie archive live can function proactively to generate new spaces through performance.

Because film and cultural studies often consider home movies as artifacts, this chapter proposes a friendly counter-move to reframe home movies as dynamic vectors. Scholars often position home movies as evidentiary and referential. In contrast, my argument shifts the conceptualization of the home movie into a system of resonant polyvocalities. Performative, embodied, sensual, multisensory responsiveness underwrites the home movie archive live. "Live" implies spectacles of the senses with bodies in material spaces that feel different from daily life.[5] The transitive, the transitory and the provisional define "live." Remix projects with classical and experimental live music, installations requiring walking, shows in clubs with multiple projections on walls, and guided bus tours with home movies on monitors chart the shape-shifting landscapes of the home movie archive live. These multiple, diverse terrains almost always engage a specific location.

Home movie archive live projects share similar components and concepts: analogue home movie images, digital interfaces, space, mobility, embodied spectatorship, multiple screens, historiography. They activate a pull-in rather than a push-out model. Although projections of classic silent narratives and amateur movies with live musical accompaniment represent a vital arena, projects where the sound/music is subservient to the projected image will not be considered.[6] In contrast, home movie archive live projects craft a

sensorium through an aesthetic of disjunction and contradiction, amplifying place and space.

This chapter confines itself to projects that collaborate with archives with large holdings of amateur films. These projects position spectators' bodies in different relationships to images through additive structures combining live music, reconfigured screens, and diverse exhibition spaces. Spatial rather than temporal, these various live projects reconceive images as mobile architectures rather than as artifacts.[7] Relational aesthetics, postcolonial historiography, and open space provide a way to situate the significance of home movie archive live projects. All the projects under discussion represent collaborations between archives, artists, performers, and scholars. The images have not been downloaded from Internet sites, illegally copied, hacked, or pirated. Indeed, they propose a third way, a middle ground, between intellectual property and free culture: collaboration between archives and performers/producers in one-off situations.

What components and conceptual models change when the archive shifts from a fixed, immobilized place into migrations and movements across and between people, spaces, platforms, iterations? Can the archival image be reshaped as malleable, transferable, mutating? How does the archival image migrate from the private and quarantined to a more public, collaborative, embodied encounter, and convening? As the home movie archive moves away from its focus on the precious, monumentalized, fetishized image, how can we understand its migration into these new materialized, performative spaces of the "live"?

Once home movies are recovered and deposited in archives, a default position emerges: their acquisition is all that matters. The thing itself—the celluloid reels, metal cans, deteriorating color—become more and more fetishized as fixed representations. Instead, the home movie artifact can be repositioned as open and active, no longer a mortuary of nostalgic historic images shrouded in longing, desire, and quaintness. Instead, these archives can be seen as dialogic relationships with specific histories, a relocation away from nostalgia into a transversal social, political, aesthetic, and historical structure. Thus, the home movie archive live is conceptualized not as a product but as a process, not as a place but as an encounter, not as a representation but as a collaborative, dynamic space.[8]

Relational aesthetics and the archive live

This proposition for the home movie archive live presents a different routing through representations of the real and trauma than more traditional forms of fixed archival practice. In place of the politics of representation, it offers

FIGURE 19.1 *Production still of artist Simon Tarr remixing amateur films for the live multimedia performance* Dismantling War, *in collaboration with digital artist Art Jones, September 12, 2005, Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York.*

the politics of convenings. In place of artistic vision and hierarchies, it offers collaboration and horizontality. In place of argument, it offers dialogical conversation and contingencies. In place of positions, it offers encounters. In place of the global and the national, it offers provisional microterritories. In place of separations between analogue and digital, it offers a wide palette of technologies, platforms, performances. In place of a fixed image as object, it offers fluidity, permeability, intersubjective exchanges, processes.

Live performance with archival elements has a long lineage in twentieth-century experimental arts, from Dada and Futurist performances, to Fluxus happenings, conceptual art, minimalism, feminist art, and art practices that required the audience to activate the work. In *Conversation Pieces*, Grant H. Kester (2004) argues that a new form of practice has emerged that refutes the individual artistry, shock-value, abstractions, ambiguities, privileged subject, specularity of modernism and postmodernism with an emphasis on the everyday, accessibility and conviviality. Kester identifies these newly emerging, performative practices as a "collaborative and dialogical model" (25) that catalyzes the viewer into creative encounters and conversations where the outcome is not predictable. These creative encounters produce multiple, complex knowledges that establish a "collective identity through [a] shared experience" (24).

French theorist and curator Nicolas Bourriaud (2002), in his important book *Relational Aesthetics*, has also charted these new forms of

participatory art based on encounters, contingency and collaboration that produce microcommunities. He contends that each artwork in this genre is "a proposal to live in a shared world … giving rise to other relations" (22). Intersubjectivity and conviviality join together to form the machine, provoking new encounters that create micro-utopias. Proximity, rather than distance, is operative in this move from the visual to the tactile and the interactive (22). Bourriaud contends that this type of work produces a space of openness, a social interstice for possibilities: "Art ... is no longer seeking to represent utopias; rather it is attempting to construct concrete spaces" (46). A relational aesthetics introduces the networks of plurality into a work that extends beyond families, institutions, and technologies; the emphasis here is on new arrangements of agency, ideas, and space. A relational aesthetics restores polyphony and "binds heterogeneous arenas together" (94).

These ideas of relational convenings, performative encounters, polyphony and engagement can open up the home movie archive, extending it into a more spatialized, live dimension.

Historiography and the home movie live

Cinephilia represses history. It immobilizes images as rarefied objects. Cinephilia—and its correlative, archivephilia—are founded on a desire for the authentic, the uncontaminated, the untampered. The historical as that which signifies and marks changes is abandoned, replaced with a fantasized, inert, monumentalized, and static construct of history (see Hudson and Zimmermann 2009, 135–46). Tzvetan Todorov (2001, 11) argues, for example, that the monumental in historical discourse almost always suggests the authoritarian.

A more radical historiography would remove the object from the monumentalizing position and open it to the multiple vectors of recirculation for new connections, new forms, and new meanings. This conception of history rejects the idea of the historical monolith, the linear story, the fetishized object, the causal explanation, the perfect object, and the distancing between spectator/user and artifact. A radical historiography mobilizes artifacts and reanimates them, remapping them within polyphonic and multiple frameworks. This radical historiography suggests a surgical removal of the unitary object, the unified history, and the one-way relationship. For example, historiographers such as Ranajit Guha (2002), Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000), Philip Rosen (2001), and Robert F. Berkhofer (1995) have argued for a historical practice that is fluid, multiple, polyphonic, plural as a way to create not postmodern chaos, but to generate and create new forms of explanation.[9]

Heterogeneity reconceptualizes historiography, an antidote to the isolations and immobilizations of cinephilia. This historiography concentrates on the creation of new forms of knowledge production. For Berkhofer (1995), this historiography requires moving away from a unitary history towards the construction of multicultural plural pasts (170–275). Charkrabarty (2000) and Rosen (2001) have also advanced multiple temporalities layered on each other as a way to dislodge the linear causality embedded within both history and cinephilia. In these conceptualizations, multiple viewpoints, contradictions, and disjunctures abound. The home movie archive live, then, mobilizes and embodies a conception of multiple temporalities.

Dialogic archives

The home movie archive live is always open and recombinant, active rather than static, evolving not fixed. It opens to the future. The home movie archive is a process and not a product. Always revised, the archive is dialogic and transversal, creating new forms of understanding, explanation, and relation.

Home movies can become anchored in their specificity for what they represent, for what is inside the image and the frames. Although this evidentiary gesture in considering the home movie marks its historical and archival significance and locates it as an object, it does not exhaust the explanatory possibilities of these images in relationship to other images and other spaces.

Ranajit Guha (2002), in his *History at the Limit of World-History*, argues that imperialist history installs stories and histories from the everyday. These state-centered histories redefine temporality as a linear narrative progressing from the storyteller down, rather than emerging from interaction with the listeners gathered together to hear a story. Listeners gathering, and storytellers telling, of course, show us a concrete example of the migratory archive. As a consequence, Guha observes that "the noise of world history and its statist concerns has made historiography insensitive to the sighs and whispers of everyday life" (68). Guha suggests that history requires regrounding in everyday life through a creative engagement: "no continent, no culture, no mark or condition of social being would be considered too small or too simple for its prose" (22). This historical strategy is expressed in living contradictions charted through overlaps, contacts, struggles, and accommodations between elites and subalterns. This process restores active agency to the everyday, marshaling interrogation, contestation, modification, and transformation. Guha advocates an opening up of all the pasts to remake narratives into inventions of possible futures (45–52).

In this historiography, the home movie archive live can be reconsidered as a migratory archive, a system of works that summons a new kind of

FIGURE 19.2 *Remixed and processed image of amateur films projected for live multimedia performance* Dismantling Empire, *February 5, 2005, Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York. Artists Simon Tarr and Art Jones remixed amateur archival films with contemporary images. Image by Simon Tarr.*

transitional public space. Home movie archival objects are not static. They should not be sacralized, monumentalized, or fossilized. Artifacts—rather than archival objects—are provisional and fluid rather than fixed. They create a collaborative performative space to imagine new histories, futures, public works—the migratory home movie archive live.

In 2005 multimedia artists Art Jones and Simon Tarr created a live remix with dual screen projection called *Dismantling Empire* (U.S.A. 2005). Collaborating with the Human Studies Film Archives of the Smithsonian Institution, Jones and Tarr fashioned loops out of the amateur films shot in places that the U.S. empire had infiltrated: Ecuador, Brooklyn, India, Iraq, Mexico, Florida, Yugoslavia, France, Germany, Bolivia, Cambodia. Jones and Tarr loaded the loops on their laptops. During the performance, they reacted to each other's images, with each screen in dialogue with, and responsive to, the other. Various forms of computer animation of a digital soldier, planes, and bombs, created in 3D by Jones, were superimposed over the amateur footage. Although the HSFA footage was originally produced by travelers, missionaries, explorers, ethnographers, and lecturers, the collaborative live performance exhumed the traces of empire from the images. Shot from the 1920s through to the 1960s during the expansion of global capital, these images entered a new future with the hip-hop music track remixed live by

Jones. The loops were also manipulated live on the laptops, colorized, slowed down, repeated, with minute movements and gestures emphasized. Through image, sound, music, performance, *Dismantling Empire* inserts live into archive.

Movement in space and making space

Histories and stories are always told and retold differently, moving from the speaker to the listener, from the interface to the body, from the virtuoso to the amateur, from the private to the public, from the individual to others.

In his book and installation, *Images Cachées* (2007), made for the Centre national de l'audiovisuel in Luxembourg, visual artist Yves Dorme pulled still images from amateur films deposited in the archive. The resulting images exemplify this movement towards the listener, the everyday, the body, the amateur, the public, others. Each still image copied from the films captures an incomplete gesture. The still images function as a retelling of the amateur film, probing what it means to be an ineffable image that moves. The images meditate on movement itself; its details, its textures, it ambiguities. In one shot, women in high heels with bare legs walk in unison down a pavement away from the camera. In another, a woman in a two-piece black bathing suit standing behind a camper van pops a grape into her mouth, bending backwards. In another, a woman sits by a window, looking up from her knitting. In another scene, two women in black-and-gray patterned dresses kiss each other.

However, *Images Cachées* was also an installation in the Centre national de l'audiovisuel. It spread over an entire gallery. Stills from the images were printed and placed on waist-level shelves that formed a grid in the room. Monitors hung from the ceiling, each showing different reels of amateur film. Against one wall, spectators could sit and search concepts and places in the amateur film archive. The installation, then, asked the spectator to collaborate in thinking through the amateur as a spatial proposition within a live framework. The screen space of the home movie was multiplied: on computers, in photographs, in film projections. The architecture of the home movie moved as well: suspended on multiple screens from the ceiling and at the waist level. The spectator was not only asked to look, but also to move: the body, here, is redeployed as an editing device through shape, texture, form, nation.

Once archives acquire amateur films, they are confronted with the problem of use and access: are these movies simply records that can be used as evidence for future compilation films and as almost fetishized objects of preservation? In 2002, the Miami International Film Festival offered the

Magical History Film and Video Bus organized by the Florida Moving Image Archive (FMIA), a kind of twenty-first century reinvention of the Soviet kino-trains. This bus tour was a model of historiographic contiguity, the idea that combinations may explain more than causality and linearity. On the tour, juxtaposed with news, history, and concrete places, the home movies acquired an urgency and depth as historical documents and as ideology: something that watching them alone could never sustain, and that inserting them into an analogy documentary would flatten. Images from the past on the screen contrasted with images out the window in a dynamic, constantly shifting montage of collision.

Since the postwar period, Miami has been a major tourist destination, a cultural phenomenon that provides a larger cultural context for the idea of a tour and fertile ground to explore the history of popular entertainment in nightclubs, television shows, and movies. During the film festival, the bus tour featured Paul George, an urban historian specializing in South Florida. George—a "human Wikipedia" of South Florida history, politics and culture—linked the past in the home movies on the bus monitors with the present rolling by, outside the windows. Home movies of families playing on the nearly undeveloped beachfront in the 1950s contrasted with the models and high fashion parading down a clogged Ocean Drive in Miami Beach.

Passing the site of the Red Carpet Club, a well-known gay bar in Miami Beach, images of police raids appeared on the bus screens. George explained that the gay community, although marginalized in the 1950s, largely motored the resurgence of Miami Beach. As we passed Mt. Sinai Hospital, historical change was shown in home movies that represented it in its former incarnation as the Nautilus Hotel, designed by Carl Fisher (the legendary developer known as Mr. Miami Beach). George noted that before the Second World War the hotel was restricted: it did not permit entrance to Jews. Later, the bus took us to Temple Emanu-El, one of the oldest synagogues in Miami Beach while we watched home movies shot outside the temple.

FMIA's location in Miami—often referred to as the place where North American and South American cultures converge—offers enormous potential to dig out unknown histories and the images that map them. Miami has large African American, Cuban, Haitian, Jewish, and Latin American communities as well as a full panoply of displaced "snowbirds." It's been a destination for Cuban exiles for over 40 years.

The tour, for example, often goes through a neighborhood called Overtown, a once thriving African American community now in decline, screening home movies of daily life on the streets and in local businesses before the expressway cut through and destroyed it. At the famous Fontainebleau Hotel, images of Sammy Davis Jr. showed him performing to happy white families

cavorting by the pool. During segregation, Davis was not allowed to stay at the hotel, so he stayed in Overtown.

Miami is known for its aggressive development, complicated history populated with entertainers, artists, gangsters, retirees and exiles, and massive changes in environmental landscape. Rather than inviting the public to come to the archive, FMIA brought the archive to the public by putting it on wheels in an air-conditioned tour bus equipped with video monitors and a DVD deck.

The footage drives the routes. The amateur film footage is never from one decade; it is scrambled to show the dynamic relationships between all layers of urban life and many different historical periods invisibly embedded in streets and buildings. The tours are performative and improvisational rather than scripted and canned.

Although specialists in South Florida such as historians, architectural critics, and film archivists have provided narration for the tours, some of the most compelling Magical History bus tours have been ones narrated by long-time local residents. These bus tours with archival films frequently spur bus riders to share their stories and memories, underscoring how the amateur and news footage can mobilize what historians have called "history from below," the memories of everyday people rather than official histories. FMIA staff often change the images they put up on the screens in response to riders' observations and queries. Thus, the bus tours and their screenings exhibit an improvizational and performative vitality that distinguishes them from more formal screenings valorizing the image.

The Magical History Film and Video Bus tour exemplifies what an interactive historical encounter might look like when situated within a matrix of live performance and movable space. The home movie archive is live, and on the bus.

Plural temporalities and provisional contiguities

Temporality in the home movie archive live is relentlessly plural: not one time frame, but many. Contiguities explain more than continuities. In history, this process of explaining an event by assembling evidence under a general hypothesis is called colligation. Heterogeneity operates as a central feature of migratory archives because this modality can loosen up the unities of discourse and practice that produce panic, amnesia, and anesthesia. This vast, untapped domain of imagining and creating migratory archives requires many approaches and tactics to move beyond the artifact into historical understanding of the significance of these works, a critical engagement with the forms of knowledge that they yield, and an enactment of public works.

Berkhofer (1995) has argued that historiography has moved history away from a single, metanarrative, realist, omniscient, and referential viewpoint that represses heterogeneity towards a more particularized, multicultural construct of plural pasts. Berkhofer terms the structure of these plural pasts as "polyvocalities," comprised of multiple viewpoints, contradictions, and disjunctures, which prompt new explanatory models (61–139).

An example of polyvocalities as performance, Astor Piazzolla's music mixes European music with African forms, classical formal structures with Argentine folk music's emotional address. A multimedia live performance of *Las Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas* (performed in 2007 in Austin, Texas) brought together two pianists, Jairo Geronymo and Jeffrey Meyer, two tango dancers (*tangueros*), and live video mixing multiscreen projections of rare archival amateur footage from Latin America, the United States and Europe, in collaboration with the Human Studies Film Archives of the Smithsonian Institution. Juxtaposing different media, art forms, and sensory experiences across the ear, eye, and touch, the performance physicalized the conceptual and musical layers in *Las Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas*. The two screens also alluded to Piazzolla's involvement as a composer of film scores. The home-movie projections generated new contiguities with the Piazzolla music, visualizing plural temporalities. This project emphasized contiguities rather than continuities.

The two screens of *Las Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas* multimedia project allude to the displacements of immigration. These amateur travelogs shot between 1915 and 1936 from Ecuador, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Rome, Venice, London, Spain, and New York connote how tango is grounded in transnational identities, lands, and experiences. Signifying unofficial histories of Latin America and Europe, these home-movie images counter dominant and official representations.

Coda: Live is polyphonic

The home movie archive live must never be unified: it is relentlessly polyvocal and polyphonic. It is combustible: collisions open new explanations, relations and collaborative spaces. The home movie archive live proposes pulling in audiences, rather than pushing out to audiences. The home movie archive live presents a dynamic archival practice where exhibition configures responsive spectatorial relationships.

The home movie archive live is simply one provisional attempt to think through some very significant problems: what happens with all this home movie footage? What is the social role of the archive? What possibilities reside in recovered material? Can digital interfaces offer new ways to open up this material? How do we connect communities with archival materials? The

FIGURE 19.3 *Pianists Deborah Martin and Jairo Geronymo in rehearsal for live multimedia concert at Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York, 2013.*

home movie archive live considers the movement of artifacts as encounters, convenings, collaborations, hybrid temporalities, migrations. To assist in this effort, perhaps archivists, scholars, musicians, and artists can join forces to produce transitory places of engagement with others.

In the end, what vectors, movements, tactics, strategies, and propositions can be deployed to imagine the amateur film archive live?

- From a fantasmatic of the past as a fixed object to be decoded to an engagement of the matrices, issues, and movements of the present moment that a live environment can foreground;
- From nostalgia for material artifacts to the construction of new transnational and translocal spaces combining history, the real, the future within a more visceral, multi-sensory environment;
- From closed circuits of connoisseurs, cultural elites, historians, theorists, and idiosyncratic auteurs to more open circuits of collaboration, networked distribution, and embodied organized encounters located somewhere, everywhere, elsewhere;
- From considering the archive as a place to collect and store images to

rethinking the archive as a convener of new spaces for collaboration, public works, and the staging of encounters;

- From the fixity of reclaimed national imaginaries to the fluidities of transnational, transversal, polyvocal vectors of movement;
- From a conceptualization of the archive as a repository of images to remaking of the archive as a mobilizer of spaces, communities, resonances, multisensory environments, sensualities, and histories;
- From the archive as a brick-and-mortar institution to the archive as an experimental encounter.

Notes

1 Full disclosure: as the co-director of the Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival, I commissioned, wrote, and directed *Memescapes*, in a collaborative team with the artists identified in this chapter.

2 For descriptions of Bill Morrison's live music/archival film performances, see http://www.billmorrisonfilm.com

3 See http://www.alloyorchestra.com

4 For example, *The Moving Image*, the journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists, has been at the forefront of publishing groundbreaking research in home movie studies.

5 For a discussion of performance and "liveness" as key in the avant-garde, see Phelan (1993).

6 The annual Pordenone Silent Film Festival is a key site in global media culture showcasing live music that supports and enhances silent film.

7 For a thorough historical exploration of this shift from the temporal to the spatial in new media performance, see Dixon (2007).

8 For a theorization of live performance and archival film, see Siomopoulos and Zimmermann (2006, 111–18).

9 For an example of subaltern historiography advancing these ideas, see Guha (2002). For a discussion of how historiography has shifted away from narrative linearity and artifacts, see Munslow (1997).

20

An Inward Gaze at Home: Amateur First Person DV Documentary Filmmaking in Twenty-First Century China

Tianqi Yu

Introduction

Family Phobia (*Jiating Kongju*, 2010), which will be at the center of my analysis in this chapter, is Chinese amateur filmmaker Hu Xinyu's third personal documentary, a seven-year-long documentation of the mundane life of his parents in their small state-subsidized flat in an inland city of the coalmining Shanxi province in northern China. The production of *Family Phobia* was not carefully planned, as Hu started filming without the clear intention to make a film. Instead, it was compiled from Hu's home-movie footage, which he began to collect after his family's gathering during the 2003 Chinese New Year.

Unlike most conventional home movies that primarily document happy moments, holiday sequences, and ritual ceremonies (Odin 2007, 261), Hu's personal digital-camera eye quietly observes the daily family life at an extremely close range, not excluding the intimate, embarrassing moments, such as generational conflicts, bedroom conversations, and family dramas in which Hu himself inevitably gets caught. The act of documenting the unpleasant and the conventionally prohibited moments of one's own family rather than the usual happy faces challenges our perception of amateur home movies. As Patricia Zimmermann (2007b) points out, amateur cinema

as "a plurality of practices" includes "home movies, surveillance, narratives, experimental works, travelogues, documentaries, industrials, hobbies, sites for emergent subjectivities" (275). For Hu, amateur filmmaking involves the collecting of home movies and the hobby of being an independent amateur documentarian, as well as serving as an outlet for his self-expression. Hu's filmmaking reflects his dual role: as both family insider and conscious outsider intentionally keeping an emotional distance from what he has been documenting.

The conflicts captured by Hu usually lie in between traditional familial obligations and individual self-realization. His work reflects some features of the changing mentality behind China's fast-individualizing society. Since the 1980s, China has experienced a state-enforced decollectivization, which is gradually untying individuals from previous social and ideological institutions, such as work units and production teams (Yan 2009, 288). However, as Yan also argues, while individuals are gaining more autonomy, the retreat of the government from public life has also left them with little social protection. As well as the conflicts represented in the film, Hu's own filmmaking practice also mirrors this individual dilemma. While it fulfills his individual interest of being a filmmaker, Hu's conscious inward gaze at home reflects the anxiety he experiences as he searches for social security and a sense of belonging.

Hu Xinyu is among the first of a group of amateur DV filmmakers that emerged in China at the dawn of the twenty-first century. While amateur cinema has been explored by some film scholars (Zimmermann 1995; Ishizuka and Zimmermann 2007; Moran 2002; Rascaroli, Young, and Monahan 2009) as a valuable alternative site that expands mainstream cinema history and as a space for history and collective memory construction, amateur filmmaking in China still remains largely unmapped, as well as untapped, partly due to the limited access to home movie cameras before and during the Mao era in the twentieth century. Therefore, when digital video cameras first emerged on the retail market in post-Mao China in the 1990s, they immediately gave rise to a personal amateur filmmaking practice. Individuals found DV cameras to be a direct mediator between the rapid social transformations and personal expression.

Working as a music teacher in a regional college, Hu Xinyu was first introduced to filmmaking as an amateur actor cast in *The World* (*Shijie*, 2004), an award-winning art-house film made by the internationally acclaimed Chinese director Jia Zhangke, a key figure of the Sixth Generation filmmakers. Jia's idea of the cinema of amateurism—filming with a DV camera on location with amateur actors and a small crew—profoundly motivated Hu, who realized that the charm of cinema lay in the rich layers of everyday life in China's transitional period (Hu 2010). During the New Year holiday of 2001, Hu borrowed some money and flew to Guangzhou, the commercial capital of the southern

coastal Canton province, to buy his first DV camera. Since then, Hu has been making amateur films, documenting his personal or familial life with great intimacy.

In the first section of this chapter, I will examine the sociopolitical and technical conditions of the emergence of DV amateur filmmaking in twenty-first century China. Facilitated by the advance in digital technology, amateur DV filmmaking is a crucial part of the new culture of self-expression, which also encouraged the rise of public citizenship. Looking at one's family through a personal camera has become a key trend in amateur DV filmmaking. In addition to Hu, there are a few other amateur filmmakers reflectively turning their cameras inwards to explore their familial selves. These include women filmmakers—such as Yang Lina with *Home Video* (*Jiating Luxiang*, 2001), Wang Fen with *They Are Not the Only Unhappy Couple* (*Bu kuaile de buzhi yige*, 2000), and Tang Danhong with *Nightingale, Not the Only Voice* (*Yeying bushi weiyi de gehou*, 2001)—who emerged almost at the same time as Hu, and whose films investigate problematic family relations and exhibit a strong authorial voice that eschews the role of a passive, obedient daughter. Following them, more filmmakers have explored the change of family structures in the rapid urbanization, most notably banker-turned-filmmaker Shu Haolun with *Nostalgia* (*Xiangchou*, 2006), a first-person memoir of the vanishing lifestyle of his childhood in a local residential area in Shanghai; Yang Pingdao with *My Family Tree* (*Jiapu*, 2008), a personal journey of returning to his family ancestors' house in a small village in southern China; and the village documentary project (2005–9) made by villager amateur filmmakers led by independent documentary filmmaker Wu Wenguang.

In the following section, through a close examination of *Family Phobia*, I will pay attention to the filmic text, to how Hu's family as a collective, his family members, and he are represented through his personal camera. In addition, I will explore the making and reception of the film as social practice, through which the filmmaker comes to understand and further construct his self in relation to others. This is similar to Roger Odin's (2007) semio-pragmatic model, which takes into account the interactions between filmmakers and the subjects, and between the filmmakers and the audience during the production and reception of the films (255). I will argue that these amateur filmmakers take a dual role in filming their families. On the one hand, as insiders in their own families, they closely observe their relatives' lives with great intimacy. On the other hand, consciously looking inwards at home as outsiders, their filmmaking constitutes a significant sociopolitical act, which offers valuable insights on how family structures and relations have been affected in China's rapid socioeconomic transition, and individuals' desire to be reconnected to the traditional institution of family. Lastly, I will analyze the reception of Hu's film and discuss how screening and viewing become sites

in which the filmmaker negotiates questions of privacy and explores the limits of what is acceptable to present of his family's life to the public.

DV amateur filmmaking in individualizing China

Amateur cinema, facilitated by the evolution of consumer-level cine cameras such as 16mm, 8mm, Super 8, video camcorders, and digital video cameras, has gained a small number of noteworthy studies (Zimmermann 1995; Ishizuka and Zimmermann 2008; Moran 2002; Rascaroli, Young, and Monahan 2009). Current scholarship insists upon the cultural and historical implications of amateur filmmaking as a counterweight to the history of dominant mainstream cinemas—including highly commercialized and government-controlled cinemas—and examines how home movies as "historical artifacts" act as "active recoveries of histories and memories" (Zimmermann 2007a, 16), and serve as facilitators for identity reconstruction (Odin 2007, 267). Some theorists focus on historical amateur footage and home movies and their use in contemporary media productions. This subfield also overlaps with studies on first-person documentary, which emphasize the role of personal documentary in self-examination and identity (re)construction (Renov 2004 and 2008; Russell 1999; Lebow 2008 and 2012a; Rascaroli 2009a).

The amateur cinema in contemporary China usually refers to the DV wave that emerged in the individualizing China of the late 1990s.[1] As already noted, the rapid economic boom that started in the 1990s has provided more resources and choices for individuals to develop their own lives, yet some social constraints still exist. For example, the *hukou* (household) system that ties individuals' identity to particular places, usually their original birthplace, continues to restrict social mobility, creating unequal rural/urban social identities and differences. While a vast section of the rural population has migrated to urban areas for work, these people remain disenfranchised, struggling to receive the equal opportunities, such as for medical care, education for children, that their urban counterparts enjoy. The resultant social inequality has caused strong tensions among the privileged powerful officials, the newly emerged middle class, and the rural and migrant workers/lower classes. The retreat of the government from public life has also resulted in a proliferation of overcommercialized public spaces in the neoliberal economy, the privatization of real estate, and the construction of modern shopping complexes.

During the 1990s, the public space for individuals to express their personal frustrations was very limited, as cultural, media and arts institutions were still affiliated with the government. The mainstream representations of personal experience had to fall in line with the dominant ideology of maintaining

social stability—rather than causing social upheaval—especially after the 1989 Tian'anmen demonstrations. Though some underground/independent artwork and films emerged, such works remained highly marginal outside *tizhi* (the dominant economic and political structure) and were not widely viewed by the public. It was not until the 2000s that private and independent art and cultural companies and organizations flourished.

It was within this context that amateur DV filmmaking came to light, finding its soil in the postsocialist independent cinema and the new culture of self-expression facilitated by digital technology.[2] Built upon what Chinese film scholar Lü Xinyu (2003) calls the New Documentary Movement (NDM) in the 1990s, itself a crucial part of independent cinema, amateur filmmaking inherits from it *geren* (personal, individual) vision, intended as a specific personal perspective in approaching history (Wang 2008); a realistic aesthetic style, *jishi zhuyi*, or "on-the-spot realism" (Berry 2007, 116); and the "one-person filmmaking" method (Berry and Rofel 2010, 8) that allows great flexibility.

The rise of *minjian* (grassroots, nongovernmental) film festivals has also invigorated independent amateur filmmaking, as the increasing number of screening spaces has cultivated independent cine culture and provided an alternative public space for "critical public discourses" (Nakajima 2010, 134). Yunnan Multi Culture Biannual Visual Festival (Yunfest), founded in 2003, established itself as one of the key venues for independent and amateur documentary screenings. Following Yunfest, the Chinese Independent Film Festival was founded in Nanjing in 2005, and the China Documentary Film Festival was established in 2007.[3] In addition, more independent screening venues have been created in universities, cafés and bars as an emerging niche cultural scene. Moreover, state-owned central or regional TV stations, such as CCTV Channel 9 and Shanghai Documentary Channel, have started to screen independent documentaries, though the contents are still carefully selected and edited to avoid political offense. These state-run TV channels also follow the logic of the political economy of media, as the quality of amateur production has improved significantly with its lower cost, as noted by Odin (2007, 266); still, their broadcasting signifies a subtle recognition of independent voices by the state-owned media.

Amateur DV filmmaking is also rooted in the development of digital technology, including the consumer-level, easy-to-operate mini-DV camera, and the social media in the Web 2.0. While the broadcasting beta video camera *da jiqi* (big machine) was typically used by the early independent documentary filmmakers, who were usually affiliated with state-owned TV stations, the DV camera *xiao jiqi* (small machine) has significantly shifted the power of representation from the hands of experienced professionals to those of a mass of amateur individuals. Wu Wenguang, the pioneer of independent new documentary in China, regards filming with *xiao jiqi* as writing with a

pen, allowing individuals to work much more flexibly and reflexively on their own, "to break through the barrier between the filmmaker and their subjects, creating a communal experience rather than a hierarchical one" (Berry and Rofel 2010, 9). In this sense, amateurism can be seen as a form of individual empowerment, enabling the makers to get closer to their subjects and their own subjectivities. Jia Zhangke's idea of amateurism also demonstrates a spirit of democracy, as he believes that "[a]ccess to cinema is conceived of as a human right—that is, a privilege that should be universal" (Jaffee 2006, 83). This echoes the debates among scholars of amateur cinema (Odin 2007; MacNamara 1996), who believe that amateur film gives "voice to the politically, ethnically, and socially excluded, revive[s] the productive capacities swallowed up by globalization and consumerism, and restore[s] creativity and freedom" (Odin 2007, 266).

The democratic spirit of amateur filmmaking, joined with participatory media, has encouraged the rise of what Haiqing Yu (2006) calls "media citizenship" (304). As is the case elsewhere, social networks have been embraced by the Chinese population, ranging from elites, artists and intellectuals, celebrities such as Ai Weiwei, to ordinary individuals raising their personal voices in public cyberspace. This phenomenon can be seen as a strong rebuke to the control of public speech in the Mao era. Even though the same restrictions still exist, local social media (e.g. www.renren.com), and video-sharing websites (e.g. www.youku.com and www.tudou.com), act as powerful platforms for sharing ideas and information within China.[4] The slogan of www.tudou.com, "Everyone is the director of life," explicitly promotes the idea of individual determination in one's own life. Blogs, and more recently the Chinese equivalence of Twitter, Weibo (which literally means "mini blog"), function as some of the most direct channels for self-expression and information sharing, though online contents are still subject to political censorship. In traditional media, new forms of TV talent shows—such as *Supergirl* (*Chaoji Nüsheng*), *China's Got Talent* and *The Voice of China*—have also provided a platform for individuals to "express uniqueness, to perform, and to engage in pastiche triumphed over regimented conformity" (Keane 2007, 43).

Reconnecting to *Laojia*

As explored, the increasing access to documenting tools and the growing desire for self-expression have paved the way for amateur filmmaking in China. One remarkable yet less examined phenomenon is the work of amateur filmmakers who look inward at their own personal familial spaces and residential communities. These fit into what Michael Renov (2008) labels "domestic ethnography," "a mode of autobiographical practice that couples

self-interrogation with ethnography's concern for the documentation of the lives of others, in particular, family members who serve as a mirror or foil for the self" (44). Whereas Renov emphasizes the representation of the familial others as a reflection and extension of the self, filmmakers in the decollectivizing China inscribe themselves relationally in the net of their family dynamics, demonstrating a proactive move to reconnect with family as a collective unit. Their personal family documentations are also embedded in the larger collectiveness, and belong to what Alisa Lebow (2008) calls "the first person plural," that "engages with the embodied knowledge, history, memory, and identity of a much larger entity" (xv). As well as documenting the lives of his family members in *Family Phobia*, Hu and his "fly-on-the-wall" camera have, as an inseparable unit, been contemplatively constructing the ongoing family history.

It is the *laojia*, which literally means "the old home," that attracts the central attention of many domestic ethnographers' amateur gaze. In Shu Haolun's *Nostalgia*, narrated through the filmmaker's poetic and reflective first-person voice, *laojia* refers to Shu's grandmother's house in Dazhongli, a *shikumen*, "stone gate"–style residential area. *Shikumen* specifically refers to the carved-stone pillars and archways that adorn these houses, a kind of tenement building constructed in Shanghai in the colonial era from the 1920s

FIGURE 20.1 *The old houses are shown surrounded by skyscrapers in* Nostalgia *(2006). Screenshot.*

to the 1940s. When Shu Haolun made the film in 2006, Dazhongli was facing demolition under Shanghai's new urban plan, which saw the homes of generations of local residents redeveloped into modern commercial districts for the benefit of tourists as well as for the newly emerged domestic middle class (Figure 20.1). A similar concern emerges in Yang Pingdao's *My Family Tree*, in which the *laojia* is the family ancestors' house that is associated with the old and the dying and that has been left behind in the small village. In these two films, though new nuclear families have been created, the demolition or the decline of *laojia* indicates the loss of family centers, roots and an old lifestyle that links all family members together as a collective whole. Shu and Yang's inward gaze demonstrates a conscious reconnection to the old family space, one in which they reflect on where they have come from and what influences have helped to construct who they are. Their films also become a piece of family heritage for the later generation to remember and to reimagine a family space that is fading away.

In contrast, *laojia* in Hu Xinyu's *Family Phobia* has not physically changed through the years; instead, it is the reshaping of external cityscape and people's mentality that has made the unchangeable familial space inappropriate. In Hu's film *laojia* is his parents' sixty-square-meter flat in an old-fashioned state-subsidized *jiashu yuan* (family dependents courtyard), a

FIGURE 20.2 *The view of jiashu yuan covered by snow, seen through the window of Hu's parents' flat in* Family Phobia *(2009). Screenshot.*

FIGURE 20.3 *Hu follows the father walking into an old-fashioned flat in* Family Phobia *(2009). Screenshot.*

kind of community housing where staff members of state-owned work units used to live, or are still living (Figure 20.2). While the process of privatization of housing that was initiated in the 1990s saw many modern apartments and commercial real estate being built, socialist state-subsidized apartment buildings still remain as homes for many former workers in the work units. In *Family Phobia* Hu's parents have been living in their small flat for a long time: Hu's camera reveals the dark and dirty hallway and stairways of the building, where cheap commercial advertisements are messily pasted on the walls, serving as a symbol of the market economy, and the general air of neglect seems to signify the decline of socialist collectivism (Figure 20.3).

Hu films mostly during the New Year period, when more than 20 family members come back to the *laojia* from their own nuclear homes or from work. The limited room in the small flat means that there is little individual space and everyone must connect to each other to some extent. Hu's camera is sometimes placed on a tripod, observing the family members surrounding the "grandparents" (the eldest generation) and watching the New Year Gala on the TV in the living room, or having dinner together at a round table. In other sequences, Hu's camera moves around the crowded domestic space, encountering different family members who remain physically close to each other as they perform various activities.

A dual self: Documenting the unpleasant, the forbidden, and the intimate

Zimmermann (2007b) states that "Amateur films map the private sphere from the point of view of the participants, collapsing the borders between subject and object" (278). As both the documenter and the documented, Hu is what Catherine Russell (1999, 277) regards as both the "seer" (the origin of the camera gaze) and the "seen" (the "body image" of the film).[5] Most of the time, the camera "eye" and the "I" quietly observe the family, almost from a third-person perspective, magnifying his outsider's identity as someone who consciously documents the triviality of family lives from extreme proximity.

One striking feature that differentiates *Family Phobia* from many other amateur home movies is the brutal exposure of family conflicts and dramas. The idealized projections, such as smiling faces and joyful moments, wedding ceremonies, and the births of new babies, tend to dominate home-movie-based films. The title of Hu's work, *Family Phobia*, however, immediately suggests the filmmaker's anxieties and ambivalence around ideas of family and home. Gazing inward at his own familial space, Hu captures the generational clash and private disputes, which are closely identified with the former socialist period and the consequences of the transition from a planned to a market economy.

After the opening sequence with the sound of a morning radio program, the film starts with a long shot in the bedroom, facing the bed. Hu's father is standing by the bed in the middle of the frame, trying to wake his grandson Chaochao. This is followed by a sequence of shots observing Hu's parents' daily lives in the domestic space, such as a long shot showing the father sitting on a stool while the mother is cutting his hair, and closeups of the mother administering eye drops to the father as he lies on the bed.

Hu's camera does not pretend it is not there; in fact, it is precisely Hu's identity as an insider, the youngest son in the family, that gives him the proximity to film some very intimate and emotional moments of his family's life without any hint of rejection or intentional performance for his camera. During these years, his family members have become used to Hu's small DV camera and are indifferent to his filming, though they do not really understand why he does it. In a sequence in which Hu follows his father across the street, his father shouts at him: "Watch the cars! What's the point of recording this?" The family members regard Hu's filming as his hobby, albeit a rather useless one that earns him neither money nor a wife, the two things about which the family cares most (Hu 2010). In certain moments, Hu's voice is heard talking to family members, such as when his brother talks to him about employment, and when his mother talks to him about his marriage.

Hu also sometimes presents himself directly on camera as "seen." I would suggest that, at the moment when Hu is seen by the audience, he is indeed presenting himself to be seen by his "other" self: the filmmaker who is quietly observing his own "familial" self.

The generational conflicts revealed by Hu's personal camera are not rare occurrences; in fact, they reflect an important feature of interpersonal relationships in contemporary China: the coexistence of a mixture of different generations with distinctive social and ethical values, formed by varying and sometimes contradictory sociopolitical structures that emerged at different points in twentieth-century China. In *Family Phobia*, the eldest generation, the "grandparents," are Hu's parents; the second-generation family members are Hu and his brother and sisters, born between the late 1950s and early 1970s; and the youngest generation is represented by Hu's nephew and niece, born in the late 1980s and 1990s. The conflicts center on daily family lives, from *yi shi zhu xing* (clothing, food, accommodation, and transport), education, career, and marriage, through to international relations. These concerns reflect personal perceptions of an individual's freedom, and family and nation as collectives, while also mirroring the larger changes in social structures and ideologies in China in this period. It is interesting to note that, as the eldest generation, the retired grandfather—Hu's father—is seen as the authority figure in the family, who intervenes in nearly every family issue. He firmly holds the family together as a collective whole, insisting that one should study and modernize oneself in order to make a contribution to the nation. His voice is the first one heard in the film—when he stands by the bed asking his grandson to wake up and recite English. It is his voice that is the one most heard throughout the film; in contrast, we hardly hear the youngest generation speak, despite the many conflicts provoked by their "improper" behavior. This youngest generation lives in a time when China's economy has started to grow and has experienced a much richer material life, when the general ideology has moved from the socialist collectivism to the so-called hedonism of a market economy.

As the "man of the house," the father also interferes with the lives of the second generation. Arguments usually take place at the dining table, presented in long shots framed by the camera in a corner of the room. At these moments, Hu also presents himself as "seen," sitting with the family. Just like other sequences, the family members have their discussions as if the camera was not there. Such conversations are not just about personal issues but also about their conflicting beliefs in the nation. In one dining-table scene (Figure 20.4), when Hu's third sister comes back from the United States to visit the family, the father is in the middle while the children are sitting around him. As the conversation unfolds, Hu's third sister shouts loudly that Tibet should be an independent state. The father seems very angry and

FIGURE 20.4 *Hu's sister discusses the Tibetan issue with her father at the Dining table in* Family Phobia *(2009). Screenshot.*

insists that Tibet is historically part of China; however, the sister expresses her opinion even more strongly, stating in front of her father that her parents have been totally brainwashed by the Communist Party. Having lived outside this familial space and formed her own family with an American husband in the United States, Hu's third sister does not follow the traditional codes of behavior of a daughter and openly challenges her father. Displaying this family debate on camera, Hu makes no personal judgment over his father's socialist ideology or his sister's Americanized beliefs in western democracy.

However, this conflict leads to a larger fight between father and daughter that results in the father's refusal to recognize her. At this moment, Hu also gets involved and it is the first time he explicitly expresses himself in the film. Towards the end of the film, a long shot shows Hu and his sister sitting side by side on the sofa in the living room, the voice of the father coming from outside the frame, shouting at the sister. The fight is still going on. Hu says to his sister: "I have chosen not to fight with them for several years, just to be quiet." However, as the father continues to shout at them, Hu cannot stay quiet any longer and, standing up, positioned in the center of the frame, he rebukes his father: "You are the Mao Zedong in this family!" (Figure 20.5). This is the first time that Hu explicitly vocalizes his own personal view in the

FIGURE 20.5 *Hu stands up and shouts at his father "You are the Mao Zedong in this family!" in* Family Phobia *(2009). Screenshot.*

film, loudly challenging the family authority. The father, however, responds from outside the frame and criticizes Hu's filming: "Today I carried 35kg of stuff and you were just filming me!" This argument depicted in *Family Phobia* opens up a larger debate about the ethical position of the filmmaker: the choices he or she makes on what to film and how much to show. At this moment, Hu does not respond to his father's comment; instead, he chooses to stop the scene, leaving the discussion unresolved, giving the audience room to judge, and allowing him the space to reflect on what has happened.

One of the family tensions that directly relates to Hu is his marriage. Hu's situation of being nearly 40 years old but still without a proper girlfriend is a constant worry for his family. It is important to note that while the father/grandfather is concerned about the "public" aspect of family issues, such as education and career, the mother/grandmother is more concerned with the personal issues of her children, especially Hu's marriage—which, in China, is not just a personal issue. Marriage stands for the continuity of the family through procreation.[6] In one scene in *Family Phobia*, the mother stands in the middle of the frame, facing the camera, telling Hu (who is behind the camera) her ideal image of a good wife for him. Hu deliberately presents himself on camera as a speechless child being educated by his parent—his quietness

suggests his unimportance in the family as an individual in his own right, though ironically his marriage is important to the family as a collective whole.

The important role of individuals to one's family is also reflected in the changing relationship between individuals and the modern state in the ongoing decollectivization process. The lack of social protection from the state in the current era is in stark contrast to the social benefits offered by Mao's government. Increased pressure has been placed on individuals and, in turn, this has led to a strengthening of the ties between individuals and their families. As one takes from the family in terms of security, one is also expected to give back to the family members, especially to the elderly. When Hu's parents are alone, the 80-year-old couple's conversations are centered on the rising price of domestic appliances and medication. In one scene, Hu observes the father in extreme closeup talking on the phone to Hu's third sister in America. The moment he mentions health care, he suddenly breaks down, recalling a time when he was ill in 1994 and his realization that if he couldn't afford to pay for the hospital, he would not receive any treatment: "I was there spitting blood and they just ignored me! They only treat you when you have paid. What sort of country is this! It only serves rich people." In these moments, Hu does not speak from behind the camera: he just stands there, observing the emotional moments and insecure feelings of his aged parents. His quietness also suggests his powerlessness to provide his old parents with a better life, and implicitly seems to confirm his father's critique that amateur filmmaking is a useless hobby that will not provide him with economic power.

Screening the private family to the public: Pushing ethical boundaries

Although Hu did not initially have the intention of crafting a film out of his personal home-movie footage when he started filming, he was soon forced to make decisions on what to include and what to cut out. This negotiation of ethical issues is another important aspect of amateur documentary; the exhibition of amateur film problematizes the border between the private and the public, and pushes the boundary of how much to present of one's life to the audience. In my interview with Hu (2010), he did not make clear whether his family knows that he has screened the film in public and admitted that "I would not show this film to them [Hu's family], as they would think this is nothing, not an achievement at all. They would think 'you should at least ask me to dress up properly for your camera.' They think that art should be beautiful and shining." It is a revealing observation that makes clear that, while

Hu's family members know that they are being filmed, they do not know what it is for. Constructing the film as a sample representation of a family in the transitional China, Hu has made his insider's identity as a member of his own family secondary, something to be examined by the audience and by himself as the filmmaker. Nevertheless, an inward gaze at home from amateur eyes is more than just a self-reflection. By screening it to the public, it has become a social practice of exerting one's identity as an independent individual, and as a citizen negotiating both family ethics and public social responsibilities.

On the other hand, audiences' response to amateur personal documentaries also reflects people's changing perception of the public and the private. Through the years, Hu has experienced a shifting attitude towards his films. His first amateur independent documentary, *The Man* (*Nanren*, 2003), observes the very intimate emotional and sexual lives of himself and two male friends, as well as their direct, uncensored comments on women. When it was shown in independent film festivals in China, the film received strong criticism, especially from female audiences, for its provocative language and sexist behavior toward women (Hu 2010). Hu's second film, *My Sister* (*Wode Jiejie*, 2006) observes the family lives of his third sister in a typical suburban American middle-class environment. Similarly, it also received criticism, both from inside the family and from the audience. It was suggested that Hu's personal camera eye, peeping or "zooming in," seemed like a stranger breaking into his sister's private domestic space. When I spoke with other filmmakers and some members of the audience about these two films, some were critical of Hu's overt exposure of private, personal lives, which they felt put the audience in an uncomfortable position.

While some criticize Hu, the influential documentary filmmaker Wu Wenguang has encouraged him to keep producing these personal documentations of his family (Hu 2010). In recent years, more screenings of personal documentaries have been shown to audiences at independent film screening events in China, including the villager documentary projects started in 2005, and the artist/dancer Li Ning's *Tape* (*Jiaodai*, 2009), which is similar to Hu Xinyu's *Family Phobia* in its uncovering of Li's own problematic relationship with his wife, and the dilemma he faces between family obligations as a husband/father and his pursuit of artistic expression. Such films keep challenging viewers' perception and idealized imaginings of family, as well as the expectation that social responsibility comes with documentary filmmaking. The increasing self-expression through mainstream media and social networks has also made audiences more used to the exposure of intimate private lives and, tellingly, Hu's *Family Phobia* did not face the same criticism as his other two films. Lastly, it should be noted that Hu is quite selective on where his films are shown inside mainland China: his concern, however, is less about the ethical issues of filming his family and more about

political sensitivity, as the dining table debates on Taiwan and Tibetan issues may bring trouble to his family (Hu 2010).

In my interview with Zhang Yaxuan (2010), a Beijing-based independent film critic, she commented on the unlimited exposure of personal issues, which reflects the current imbalance in Chinese society:

> Every society needs to leave an exit point for individual personal expression. But in China, this exit has been so small for a long time. The public space has been so strong that it represses the growth of personal space. For a long time personal emotion cannot be openly expressed … Therefore, when there is an opportunity of expressing oneself through DV camera, things are disclosed without a limit. One cannot say it is not good, as no one can give a simple ethical judgment.

Zhang's observations on the unbalanced development of the public and the private spaces and the accompanying ethics in contemporary China are certainly valid. The overt exposure of private family conflicts and prohibitions can be seen as a critical response to the mainstream and official documentation of the family imaginary. However, instead of simply concluding that the amateur filmmaking practice is ethically problematic, it could be argued that this practice opens up critical and timely debates on how one interacts with others in public spaces, as well as in the private domain. Yan (2009) regards social interactions among strangers, who are outside familial relations or other social groups, as new types of sociality: "Along with the increase of mobility in social scale and geographic scope, more individuals found themselves interacting in public life with other individuals who were either unrelated or total strangers, whereby collective identity and group membership became secondary to individual identity and capacity" (284). When a person points the camera at close family members as well as at him or her self, and displays the camera-mediated personal images to a public audience, the filmmaker as an individual bears the ethical responsibility of how to communicate with the filmed subjects, as well as with the audience. In other words, amateur filmmaking practice in twenty-first-century China reflects, and leads us to face, a new challenge in the rapidly individualizing society: that is, how one interacts with other individuals as individuals—in this case an individual with an amateur DV camera—and how one negotiates the power of representation.

Notes

1. Independent (*duli*) and underground (*dixia*) are two terms that have been used frequently to describe the sociopolitical conditions of films produced in China since the early 1990s without official finance or production infrastructure. Paul Pickowicz (2006) argues that it is "underground" rather than "independent" that is part of the identity of filmmakers who work outside the state system, and that two key features are its illegal status and its politically illicit gestures (1–22).
2. Zhang Yingjin (2006) prefers to use the term "independent" to describe such alternative modes of production and circulation of these films. Berry (2006) argues that independent Chinese filmmaking is not just freed, but also enabled and shaped by the changing power dynamics. He points out the three-legged system from which Chinese independent filmmakers have emerged and within which they are now situated: the party-state apparatus, the marketized economy, and foreign media and art organizations ("Independently Chinese" 109). In this chapter, I use Berry's concept of "independent" to describe these films.
3. However, while I was writing this article, China Independent Film festival in Nanjing has been closed down in 2011. China Documentary Film Festival was forced to close down in 2012.
4. At the time of writing, Facebook and YouTube are still blocked in mainland China.
5. Catherine Russell (1999) points out four levels of self-inscription in autoethnographic film and video: the self as "the speaker," who usually speaks through a first-person voice-over; the self as "the seer," the "origin of gaze" of a film; the self as "the seen," the "body image"; and the self as the editor, who constructs a certain aesthetic style (277).
6. Berry and Farquhar (2006) have analyzed how marriage and children represent such continuity in Ang Lee's first hit *The Wedding Banquet* (*Xi yan*, 1993), in which the aged parents worry about the marriage of their son.

21

Shooting for Profit: The Monetary Logic of the YouTube Home Movie

Lauren S. Berliner

"Is this real life?" seven-year-old David DeVore asks his dad from the backseat of a car. "Yes, this is real life!" his father replies with a chuckle. David's eyes roll back as he spins his head in circles. Leaning forward in his seat, he roars into the camera lens, then falls back in exhaustion. He waves his hand in front of his face and declares "okay, now … okay, now I … I have two fingers … I have four fingers." Struggling to contend with the experience of coming out of anaesthesia after a dental procedure, David continues with revelations as his father responds with feigned sincerity. His tone reveals his amusement with David's behavior and functions as a wink to viewers. David's father, who claims to have initially shot this video in order to document the surgery day for David's mother, but then decided to share with a larger group of family and friends, had designated it as "public" on YouTube because of the 25 email limitation on the number of links he could send for private viewing (davidafterdentist.com). A week after uploading, the two-minute video, fittingly called "David After Dentist", had already garnered three million views, which not only brought the family celebrity, but also significant financial profit.

David's question "is this real life?" gestures to the multiple layers of mediation that led his private post-surgery experience to become one of the most watched and circulated self-produced video clips in recent history. The clip has been viewed over 115 million times since its initial posting at the end of January 2009, far exceeding the number of views of most videos on YouTube, including amateur documentation of major world events, such

as those of September 11.[1] How is it that a video as brief and seemingly mundane as a child on a ride home from the dentist became so popular? Since YouTube's emergence in 2005, funny, serendipitous home movie clips like "David After Dentist" have risen to become some of the most watched content on the site. From toddlers biting each other, "talking" pets begging for food, impromptu speeches by precocious children, and cats caught crawling in and out of everything, these videos celebrate the unexpected emerging from within everyday contexts. Popular discourse about YouTube often lauds it as a platform that democratizes participation, equalizing the opportunity for everyday people to produce and distribute their media content. Yet not all content on the site gets equal viewing. It is particular kinds of viewing material, which I will refer to as "humorous home videos," that tend to circulate widely.

Some scholars have linked the expansion and range of humorous home videos to the proliferation of amateur video-recording technologies and the ever-increasing opportunity to capture un-staged, everyday moments (Chalfen 2002; Moran 2002). Others have suggested that the global circulation of the genre of fortuitous, funny home videos is suggestive of the universal appeal of these types of videos (Lange 2009; Strangelove 2010). As *America's Funniest Home Videos* (U.S.A, 1989–present) executive producer Vin Di Bona postulates:

> It's lasting comedy—comedy being done by your neighbors. There's something that goes back to the days of Chaplin and Keaton and vaudeville and basic slapstick when you watch somebody take a header off a trampoline or get it in the crotch with a piñata stick. In some respects it seems the same things keep happening, but there are endless variations that keep it reasonably fresh. (Rice 2007)

In this chapter I argue that there is more contributing to the popularity of these videos than the coincidental alignment of viewer tastes and the fortuitous excesses of prodigious digital home-video archives. Since 2009, the site's parent company, Google, has made the monetization of content its top priority. In its efforts to monetize, YouTube mimics the tactics of its exceptionally successful analogue antecedent, the television show *America's Funniest Home Videos*, which first introduced the idea that home movies could function as mass entertainment that could attract sponsors. I wish to draw attention to the parallel video classification and regulatory systems at work on YouTube and *America's Funniest Home Videos* in order to illustrate how technological, social and legal factors coordinate to encourage the production, circulation, and publicity of this very particular kind of home movie across time and media platforms.

Three key factors contribute to the popularity of humorous home videos on YouTube. First, we must examine how regulatory systems of evaluation are institutionalized in the form, enabling some video content to be uploaded, but not others. Humorous home-video content is thus some of the easiest material to upload and circulate without a challenge. Second, the generic conventions are not simply a product of the structure of YouTube and *America's Funniest Home Videos*, but can also be understood as a product of culture that has existed since the rise of this particular television show in 1989. Examining the regulatory structures and systems of evaluation of content on both *America's Funniest Home Videos* and YouTube illuminates a shift in what visual anthropologist Richard Chalfen (1987) calls the "home mode" of production. The home mode produces amateur representations of domestic life and other things known to be (re)viewed by invested spectators within a delimited sphere that excludes strangers and mass audiences (8). Whereas the generations of twentieth-century home-movie makers to whom Chalfen refers primarily used their works to produce symbolic representation within the family, communicating to their exclusive audiences, home-movie producers in the YouTube era inherently negotiate between their own discrete social worlds on the one hand, and a potential worldwide, mass audience on the other. When viewers share links to videos, and participate in "liking" and commenting on them, they reinforce the social value of the content. In this way, cute, funny, idiosyncratic home videos often serve as cultural capital. Producing or "capturing" these kinds of moments has become a popular way to participate in social media and, in turn, impacts modes of production.

Third, producing home videos not only functions as social capital, but may also translate into monetary reward. With each click of the play button, viewers simultaneously produce capital for the advertisers, Google, and people like the DeVores who have uploaded their videos.[2] In so doing, they reinforce the commodification of everyday life incidents, antics, and affects and add to the commercial viability of the site. Put simply: the wider circulation and monetization of home videos adds complexity to the increased intermingling between home video production and professional, commercial production while amplifying an already common amateur vernacular that was first established on *America's Funniest Home Videos*.[3]

In what follows, I draw comparisons between the regulatory and evaluative structures on both *America's Funniest Home Videos* and YouTube, and examine how similar types of videos come to be produced through these channels. I then illustrate how these factors come to bear on one of the most popular videos of YouTube's recent history, "David After Dentist". Through this example it will become apparent that humorous home videos on YouTube do not exist simply to please viewers or to offer home moviemakers a cost-free platform to share their clips.

The (voting) ghost in the machine

America's Funniest Home Videos emerged in 1989, a time when video recording and reproduction devices had begun to proliferate in consumer markets, making home movie production more portable, less expensive, and easier to record, play back and reproduce. The combined factors of extended recording time and the significantly lower cost of tapes (as opposed to film) provided the conditions for home moviemakers to be less careful with their use of each moment of filming. This enabled an increase in the range and amount of content captured. With camcorder technology, people could tape over mistakes and edit down their movies much more easily than was possible with Super 8.[4]

From camcorders left on by accident, to interference with the intended scene, video helped yield home archives with a glut of unintended excess, effectively widening the range and sheer quantity of family representation. The profusion of home video "mistakes" and accidentally captured footage, paired with the easy reproduction and distribution of video, helped to launch a new television entertainment genre. Built out of the success of programs like *Candid Camera* (U.S.A., 1948–2005), *TV's Bloopers & Practical Jokes* (U.S.A., 1982–2004), and *Life's Most Embarrassing Moments* (U.S.A., 1983–9), *America's Funniest Home Videos*, a domestic variation of journalistic reality-based programming of the period, invited viewers to submit their own videos of funny moments to be considered by their producers for broadcast. *America's Funniest Home Videos* remains ABC network's longest-running prime time entertainment program, one of only four American television shows to have ever reached the benchmark of 500 episodes aired.

While the show's editing style, studio layout, graphics, host, and theme song have varied over the years, the fundamental content and formula have remained consistent. Segments of video are curated around category topics such as "Faceplants," "Cuteness," and "You've Gotta Be Kidding Me!" Claiming to specialize in a particularly American brand of clumsiness, the producers often program clips of kids and adults tripping over objects, falling off trampolines and down stairs, and—their *pièce de résistance*—people being hit in the groin. Clips are presented in a montage sequence voiced over by a pre-recording of the host (currently Tom Bergeron), who makes wisecracks about what appears onscreen, indexing to viewers what the producers think is remarkable about the clip. A live studio audience then votes for their favorites, ultimately awarding $10,000 to the best of the top three chosen that episode. Grand prize awards for the best videos in the season range as high as $100,000 with a dream vacation, as reported by the *America's Funniest Home Videos* website (www.afv.com). At the time this

chapter was written, the show had given away over 13 million dollars in prize money.

While only one in every 100 submissions makes it to the air, Di Bona productions archives all video submissions in perpetuity, making it possible for a clip submitted decades ago to resurface on the air when the producers find a fit for it. This immense library contains over 1,250,000 clips. The show's producers screen out for broadcast approval any depictions of extreme violence, "offensive conduct," and serious physical injury or acts that were thought to encourage imitative behavior, while qualifying videos that emphasize the universality and spontaneity of everyday life.[5] Videos that appear deliberately staged are excluded. Winning videos have titles such as "Owl versus Dog," "Van Destroys Snowman," and "Boy Tries Skateboarding." Contestants, and those featured in the clips, sign contracts upon submitting videos that give *America's Funniest Home Videos* the right to use clips in whatever ways the producers choose. The producers, therefore, have a much greater role in determining which home videos get to be considered "America's Funniest," than do the voting audiences, who ultimately only choose winning videos from a limited sample of clips that have already been carefully selected, edited, and recontextualized.

Humorous home videos have become popular on YouTube through embedded regulatory systems that mirror the activities of *America's Funniest Home Videos*' producers, yet instead of selection decisions taking place behind closed doors in a production building, they are embedded in code. YouTube's software contains built-in regulatory structures that evaluate, disqualify, and privilege the display of certain videos.[6] The invisibility of these systems helps to naturalize the appearance of YouTube as a democratic platform, solely driven by users' tastes and interests. As Siva Vaidhyanathan notes in his 2011 polemic tome *The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Care)*, the business model of YouTube's parent company Google is designed to categorize user-generated content algorithmically. Like Google, the YouTube search engine sorts videos based on how recent the video is and the total number of hits it has received, as it also censors out videos that have been deemed "offensive" by Google employees whose job it is to filter out such content.

Within the information on how to upload videos, YouTube emphasizes a desire to promote content that is "suitable for everyone." The site presents its rules through what they call "community guidelines," which exist to inform users how to determine a video's suitability for the site. Here, YouTube encourages users to self-select out of their own content that which may be perceived as objectionable to the company's employees before they attempt to upload.

YouTube also tightly polices copyright through a software program called Content Id, which automatically removes videos that have been identified

by an algorithm in the system that flags any content that conflicts with ownership rights. The rules for inclusion are written in a casual, playful tone that speaks to the user as if he or she should inherently understand the "common sense" principles that inform their terms in order to "steer clear of trouble." The YouTube community guidelines include some of the following points:

> *YouTube is not for pornography or sexually explicit content.* If this describes your video, even if it's a video of yourself, don't post it on YouTube. Also, be advised that we work closely with law enforcement and we report child exploitation.
>
> Don't post videos showing *bad stuff* like animal abuse, drug abuse, under-age drinking and smoking, or bomb making.
>
> *Graphic or gratuitous violence is not allowed.* If your video shows someone being *physically hurt, attacked, or humiliated, don't post it.*
>
> YouTube is not a shock site. *Don't post gross-out videos of accidents, dead bodies or similar things intended to shock or disgust.*
>
> Okay, this one is more about us than you. *YouTube staff review flagged videos 24 hours a day*, seven days a week to determine whether they violate our Community Guidelines. When they do, we remove them. Sometimes a video doesn't violate our Community Guidelines, but may not be appropriate for everyone. ("YouTube Community Guidelines"; emphasis added)

By presenting rules in a casual, friendly tone (as opposed to the legalese used on most content sharing sites and in *America's Funniest Home Videos*' terms of participation), YouTube downplays their surveillant and regulatory priorities and sidesteps the need to add specificity to the factors that determine which videos will be rejected. Their use of phrasing such as "bad stuff' implies a set of universal values, while terms like humiliation, accidents, and child exploitation are not clearly defined or described in terms of scale. We are left to question what constitutes something like child exploitation, for instance. Would posting a video of your child behaving in a way that is inconsistent with his personality while he is under the influence of pharmaceutical narcotics be considered exploitation? Clearly not, according to YouTube: "David After Dentist" appears not to have met any challenge. Producers likely intuit that it does not fall within the rubric of child exploitation because it strongly resembles tropes that were approved and popularized by *America's Funniest Home Videos.*

It appears that the curatorial system of *America's Funniest Home Videos* is mirrored in the coding embedded in YouTube's video (de)selection software. Yet it is important to recognize that the prominence of certain categories of

videos is not purely the consequence of the structure of the media; participant agency also plays a significant role in determining what content gets produced and promoted. People self-regulate what to post based on their knowledge of what will be accepted, and many are also driven to produce particular kinds of content in the pursuit of having their videos "liked" by viewers—a move that after reaching a notable benchmark of hits, becomes analogous to winning an episode of *America's Funniest Home Videos.*

America, America, this is you!

Even though we may think of the content on YouTube as diverse, the dominance of humorous home videos promotes modes of video production within one's personal sphere and suggests ways in which people should think about their relationships to their own home recording devices. For instance, within the American middle class, if a baby or a pet does something funny, adults with cameras are often encouraged to record the event and post it online. So while there may be more diversity in the overall types of videos that have been uploaded to the site, it does not necessarily mean that every kind of video will proliferate.

Further, while YouTube does not have the spatial or temporal limitations that *America's Funniest Home Videos* has as a television show, regular users learn what kinds of content will be frequently linked to and thereby viewed often. What is missing in terms of space is actually replaced by "likes" or the number of times the link is spread around or clips of the video have been celebrated and reported on in other media contexts. On YouTube a video's views are increased when links elsewhere on the Internet connect back to it on YouTube. Videos also receive greater circulation when they are tagged and titled with keywords that link them to popular videos. In effect, one video's popularity begets a related video's popularity, and like any popularity contest, popularity is not necessarily commensurate with the quality of the object in question as much as it is with how often and where it circulates. The popularity of a YouTube video can be achieved when a producer links it to other social media. The generic conventions are ultimately reinforced through popularity. "David After Dentist", for example, was mentioned several times in the mainstream (offline) news media, which in turn drove traffic back to the video clip on the site.

Through YouTube Insight, a feature that offers users the opportunity to see who has been viewing their videos, viewers' demographic information and listings of which websites have linked to the video are made visible. In the field of Cinema and Media Studies, "how-to" manuals have long been considered influential in shaping home moviemaking discourse and practice.

Hosting over 1000 user-generated "how-to" videos on best practices for monetizing content, as well as related blogs, such as *YouTube Trends*, the site encourages best practices for nonprofessional producers based on marketable commonalities that are evident on the most popular videos on the site (Miller 2011). For site content producers, the opportunity to access information on the success rates of the most popular videos and information about who is screening them can be compared to *America's Funniest Home Videos* contributors' knowledge of who is viewing the show, made visible through images of the studio audience.

In 1994, at the height of *America's Funniest Home Video*'s popularity, Laurie Ouellette persuasively argued that, rather than democratizing the media or widening the scope of family representations, the show actively delimits the political potential of citizen videomakers by reinforcing the view that camcorders are for family use. The notion of personal cameras as existing for the recording and distribution of humorous home movies is emphasized in the lyrics of "The Funny Things You Do" (1989), *America's Funniest Home Videos*' theme song that played during the 1990s (which has since been replaced by an instrumental ska/reggae version of the same tune):

> We've got laughs from coast to coast to make you smile,
> A real life look at each of you, to capture all that style.
> And you're the red, white, and blue, oh the funny things you do,
> America, America, this is you!
> Stories from your friends next door, they never told,
> You might be a star tonight, so let that camera roll.
> And you're the red, white, and blue,
> Oh the funny things you do,
> America, America, this is you!

The theme song not only reminds viewers that by submitting their home videos they can become television "stars"; it also insists that America is about a different kind of democratic expression—one in which the American character is reflected back as funny, clumsy, endearing, and cute. José van Dijck (2007) argues that the combined presence of camcorders, webcams, and digital file-sharing platforms like YouTube is significant in that currently people have access to images of other peoples' families and the opportunity to give others access to one's own. The audience may be one viewer or as large as a global multitude of spectators. This opportunity for exposure engenders an oppositional home mode in which individuals are empowered to undercut normative notions of domesticity. Van Dijck echoes James Moran's (2002) prescient assessment of the cultural impact of camcorders, in which he suggests that their widespread use helped to open up familial

discourse. Yet, despite the possibilities for an exceptional range of representations of domestic life on YouTube, the prominent videos share generic conventions that reinforce the "happy family" ethos that was established through *America's Funniest Home Videos*. In the video-book *Learning From YouTube*, Alexandra Juhasz (2001) argues that, rather than promoting it as a space to experiment with new aesthetic and political approaches to media production (and by extension, shifts in discourses around American family life), the site encourages amateur producers to reproduce commercial content. Both *America's Funniest Home Videos* and YouTube operate through commercial sponsorship, so it is little surprise that these channels might wish to encourage and promote the production and circulation of noncontroversial material.

Home is where the money is

Even if it may appear that YouTube is free and open to all, it offers no less of a reward than was available with *America's Funniest Home Videos*' prize money. Fortunately for the DeVores, the launch timing of "David After Dentist" coincided with YouTube's shift towards paying users for frequently watched videos. While its strategy to increase profitability has included the addition of "webisodes" produced by and starring professional directors and actors, as well as the rental of streaming high-definition Hollywood films, Google and YouTube have also begun relying on advertising revenue that they receive when content producers like the DeVores agree to allow commercials to play at the start of their videos or advertisement inlays to appear during them. Whereas early on in the monetization process only users whose original videos had achieved a significant number of hits would be invited by YouTube to monetize their content, since mid-2012, all users now have the option to receive advertising revenue for each and every viewing of their videos. Content producers who choose to monetize their content are referred to as YouTube "partners." As one of the more successful "partners," the DeVores have earned over $100,000 from advertising on YouTube alone (Wei 2010).[7]

In their community guidelines, YouTube cautions that "content that is not suitable for everyone may not show ads" ("Getting Started Guide" 2013). While this is yet another example of a place where users must deduce what YouTube defines as suitability, what I wish to emphasize here is that the rule suggests that even videos that are acceptable to be uploaded on the site may not garner profit if they do not meet the elusive suitability standards. For actual guidance, users need only to look to videos that have passed the standards for monetization to see what qualifies and has been

monetarily successful. Just as over time *America's Funniest Home Videos* contributors have learned what kinds of videos the show's producers will accept and which have a chance of winning prize money, the high circulation of prominent humorous home videos on YouTube reinforces particular modes of practice amongst those looking to monetize. Beyond subject matter, "winning" humorous home videos on YouTube share commonalities in form. From total running time (they are typically under two minutes—much like on *America's Funniest Home Videos*) to comic timing, these videos offer a model for shooting and editing home video in ways that isolate the most monetizable moments. Months after the initial posting, Mr. DeVore uploaded "never before seen" footage from the day of David's surgery ("David After Dentist 2" 2010). Still in the space of the car, David has a conversation with his aunt, and makes many other drug-induced comments to his father that did not make the initial cut. These outtakes point to the careful editing that was involved in the production of the moment for YouTube and Mr. DeVore's awareness and adept use of vernacular video tropes. Had he not been aware of the style, form, and content that distinguishes popular humorous home movies, he may have instead posted the entire video of the trip home from the dentist, which was ultimately not much longer than the award-winning "David After Dentist" video. His careful selection and public posting of the clip reveals that there is an audience he is summoning that extends beyond the family's intimates. The video as a text functions as something more than symbolic communication within the family, or what Van Dijck (2007) calls *personal cultural* memory (2), designed to produce a particular kind of hindsight. The video is ultimately both a home mode document for the DeVore family and an audition tape.

Conclusion

Through the examination of some of the consistencies across *America's Funniest Home Videos* and YouTube, I have sought to amplify commonalities between their governing regulatory structures, the cultural assumptions about what is entertaining, the social capital in what producers believe viewers want to see, and the actual monetary capital available to everyday participants. I have argued that YouTube and its potential to bring about celebrity and forms of social and monetary capital often influence the moment being recorded, reinforcing an editorial logic that was popularized with *America's Funniest Home Videos*. Regardless of whether or not a producer ultimately chooses to upload his or her home movies to YouTube, the possibility that their home movie recording could become a celebrated YouTube video is always present. And so as we see more and more of these home videos captured in private

moments posted online, and circulated on social media sites, it is not a stretch to think that this possibility impacts how, why, and what we decide to record and share. This becomes evident when we examine the lifecycle of videos like "David After Dentist" and the many "copycat" videos it spawned. When we consider the popularity of the video in the context of these media histories, it becomes clear how cultural processes may affect the way we think about and use digital media.

Notes

1 By October 2013, the video had received 121,306,002 views, 359,685 likes, and 24,491 dislikes from YouTube viewers.

2 Some of the most famous videos of this genre include "Charlie Bit My Finger—Again!" (2007), which has received over 495 million views, and "Ultimate Dog Tease" (2011) with over 122 million views.

3 I am drawing on Hetrick (2006), who, referring to amateur video practice, uses the term *video vernacular* as "a new and more precise category to describe nonfiction videos made by untrained camera operators who attempt to realistically reflect life around them" (78). Patricia Aufderheide also uses this term in the 1995 edition of *Columbia Journalism Review.* For an excellent discussion of the relationship between home movies and television production, see Caldwell (1995).

4 In the late 1980s each minute of processed Super 8 film cost approximately $5.20. A two-hour VHS tape, on the other hand, cost as little as $2.00 and, with no processing needed, cost $.016 cents per minute.

5 On the ABC network's website, the show is described as "a weekly television series featuring home videos of kids, adults and animals during their most spontaneous and hilarious moments" (http://beta.abc.go.com/shows/americas-funniest-home-videos).

6 Contestants, and those featured in the clips, sign contracts upon submitting videos that give *America's Funniest Home Video* the right to use clips in whatever ways the producers choose.

7 The DeVore family has also earned royalties for the use of "David After Dentist" in a commercial for Vizio Internet-compliant televisions that aired during the 2010 Super Bowl. Shortly after he initially posted the video, David's father launched an online business (davidafterdentist.com) where he sells "David After Dentist" merchandise and features other videos of his children, most of which include references to the products and services of paying sponsors and charity tie-ins such as *Operation Smile*, which offers surgery to children with cleft lips and palates. The video has also led to other professional media attention, including several popular parodies, talk show appearances, and even the 2010 Webby Award for Best Viral Video. The "David After Dentist" logo—a caricature of David's face and "D.A.D." spelled out on an open tube of toothpaste—appears on both the family's

website and the YouTube page where their video is hosted, effectively linking together the family's uploaded video collection and merchandise under a unified brand. Having earned over $50,000 in merchandise and royalties on top of the advertising revenue, Mr. DeVore quit his job in real estate to grow the D.A.D. business (Wei 2010).

22

Home Movies in the Age of Web 2.0: The Case of "*Star Wars* Kid"

Abigail Keating

Introduction: The age of Web 2.0

"Web 2.0" was initially coined by electronic information consultant Darcy DiNucci in 1999, and was described as something that "will be understood not as screenfuls of text and graphics, but as a transport mechanism, the ether through which interactivity happens" (32). Subsequently, the term was popularized in 2003 by Tim O'Reilly of O'Reilly Media, who pointed out the specific characteristics that would differentiate the first and second generations of the web's. He observed a shift, from the first generation web's ties to publication towards a greater sense of participation: "[t]he earlier Web allowed people to publish content … the new Web's architecture allow[ed] more interactive forms of publishing (of textual and multimedia content), participation, and networking through blogs, wikis and social network sites" (quoted in Warschauer and Grimes 2008, 2). Other commentators have highlighted its "evolution from the *linking of information* to the *linking of people*" (Warschauer and Grimes 2008, 2; emphasis in original), noting that it "encourages the active participation of the users" (Razvan and Maria 2010, 168).[1]

Given Web 2.0's multifaceted nature, as reflected in the opportunities that it provides for the distribution of visual media, the level of critical ambivalence with which interactive video websites is often approached seems inevitable. Debates on these platforms, and on YouTube in particular, are thus rarely contained distinctively within the "for" or "against" positions. Discourses on

the phenomenon have ranged from explorations into intermediality, YouTube as archive,[2] as medium in itself, as laboratory, to the website as post-human platform. However, many of these debates—within the areas of film and media studies, and indeed other areas, like popular culture, Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), and visual anthropology—often have a common focus in that they bring to light the democratization of media space brought about by Web 2.0; whether in the form of celebratory avowals, or laments at the notion of "amateurism" and the diminishing of elitist media "laws" pertaining to production, distribution, quality, and aesthetics. While one commentator, for instance, has remarked that there is the possibility that "the works of the Keatons and Chaplins of the 21st century ... are available now somewhere on the Internet, amid the millions of miscellaneous videos" (Saariluoma 2007, 2), more critical responses mourn the demise of the professional/amateur divide, and denounce the interactive possibilities of Web 2.0 as inducing the "end" of media. Perhaps most central to this camp is entrepreneur and author Andrew Keen (2009a), who suggests that while "the Internet itself reflects a hostility towards authority ... the counterculture has [now] become the heart of capitalism." For Keen, the phenomenon of social media websites is simply the next stage in post-industrial capitalism (2009a). Keen's contribution to the discussion has become one of the most notable,[3] with his anti-Web 2.0 protestations culminating in perhaps the most forceful and best-known of his attacks, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet is Killing Our Culture* (2007). He contests that the idealism of open-source technology induces "the destruction of a professional, intellectual class," arguing that what we "have is the appearance of a new oligarchy of programmers, of people at Google and YouTube, technologists who are taking all the value out of media and monopolizing it for themselves." Maintaining that much of traditional media is "garbage," he suggests that the "amateurization of culture will reduce it even more" (Keen 2009b).

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to address the counter-argument to Keen's notion of amateurization in its entirety, my aim here is to shed light on the supposed "amateur revolution" of Web 2.0, and its ensuing effects, both technical and ethical, on the amateur moving image and the home movie, in particular, in its traditional social and cultural forms. My case study, the video "*Star Wars* Kid," which was created in 2002, stands as significant in this regard, in that not only is it considered to be one of the most watched Internet videos of recent times,[4] but that it—and, indeed, the parody phenomenon it has subsequently provoked—is a prime example of both the technical consequences and ethical issues of home moviemaking and distribution in the age of Web 2.0. While I focus predominantly on the practical and digital aspects of my case study and its manipulations, I do so in a bid to highlight the ideology surrounding their (re)production. Contrary

to many recent debates suggesting that Web 2.0 sanctions the diminishing of the traditional laws of professional media, the main aim of this chapter is to highlight the *professionalization* of the home movie through the participatory capabilities that the contemporary web invites. More specifically, I will explore the parameters between questions of authorship, of the amateur and the professional, and of individual and collective memory that are consequently brought to light through the home movie's engagement with the networked spaces of the interactive web. In doing so, I refer both to the amateur moving image's influence on mainstream, "professional" media, and to its engagement with the tools of professional media under the guise of what I will term "amateur layering." In a bid to account for the ramifications of digital manipulation in contemporary networked spaces, and as my case study is particularly symbolic of the phenomenon of "Photoshopping"—and I use that term both literally and as a synonymic verb to refer to the process of digital manipulation—I engage with interdisciplinary discussions on the possibilities of contemporary image-making in the realms of both the still and the moving image. My analysis will draw upon the work of visual anthropologist Richard Chalfen, media scholar José van Dijck, and computer scientist and new media theorist Lev Manovich.

The "*Star Wars* Kid" phenomenon

Since the dawn of online video sharing, the "*Star Wars* Kid" phenomenon has been prominent among Internet users for two reasons: firstly, in the realm of the relationship between the comedy genre and the Internet meme, as I will discuss; secondly, and less famously, as arguably the first example of media-based, media-fueled and online-originated bullying that, through the archival and open-source status of the platform from which it stems, has been permitted to continue (and multiply). Although an analysis of the legalities of the case is beyond the confines of this chapter, I will address the serious effects of the video's distribution. Therefore, the secondary aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that, in the case of the "*Star Wars* Kid" phenomenon, through the amateur's engagement with what was once conventionally regarded as "professional" and, in turn, through professional media's capitalization on the amateur, the horrific effects of cyberbullying have been "normalized" into popular culture.

"*Star Wars* Kid" as home movie

As a video, "*Star Wars* Kid" is a no-budget, unpolished amateur production, created with the most basic equipment and software. The video, which is just under two minutes in duration and was recorded in Quebec in 2002, featured and was shot by a Canadian schoolboy by the name of Ghyslain Raza. The recording took place at his school, where, using his school's camcorder, Raza captured himself doing (what looks like) an impersonation of a *Star Wars* character, appearing to use a golf club retriever as a lightsaber, the laser sword made popular by the *Star Wars* series. The tape (which originally stored a recording of a basketball game, part of which can still today be seen at the end of some versions of the video) was later discovered by a fellow student; it was then passed between friends until, for a prank, one of the students created a digital file and uploaded it to Kazaa (a peer-to-peer file-sharing network) in 2003 (Brady and Conn 2006, 9). Having been viewed millions of times, the original file was then posted on to YouTube in 2006, where it stands as one of the most viewed versions of the file.[5] It is said to have been the most watched video of its era (the term "era" indicating just how quickly things change in the landscape of viral video), through its distribution on peer-to-peer networks, blog, forum and email links, and video and other websites, with an estimated amount of well over one billion views to date.[6]

The controversy surrounding the video centers on the fact that Raza never consented to its release; following which, it was widely reported, he was so tramautized that he dropped out of school and was admitted, temporarily, into a psychiatric facility. His parents, incensed by the invasion of privacy, sued the parents of the school children who were involved in the prank (Brady and Conn 2006, 9). In May 2013, the French-Canadian magazine *L'actualité* ran an exclusive interview with Raza,[7] in which he confirmed the grave and life-changing effects that the video's circulation (and ongoing aftermath) had had on him. Now a law graduate of McGill University, Raza described the regular abuse he endured in school and gave a dark insight into this period of his life: "No matter how hard I tried to ignore people telling me to commit suicide, I couldn't help but feel worthless, like my life wasn't worth living." He also offered some advice to those currently experiencing this contemporary form of bullying: "You'll survive. You'll get through it … And you're not alone. You are surrounded by people who love you." Taking this into account, it is understandable that most of the scholarly research on the video has dealt with the problematics of its distribution and has engaged with questions of cyberbullying and of privacy and personal protection in the age of digital distribution.[8]

In media studies terms, while the circulation and private consequences of "*Star Wars* Kid" arguably represent the "Orwellian distress" that Richard

Chalfen (2002, 145) has prophesied in his work—in terms of contemporary networked and digitized media and the complexities of surveillance culture brought about by the democratization of access to (digital) media equipment—the creation of the video also falls under Chalfen's more general definition of home media in its traditional form. For Chalfen (2002), home media "consist of mediated forms of audio-visual communication that are created in private, personal ways and meant for personal and private consumption," with the term "home" "best understood as a metaphor—relieving us of the absolute necessity of always referring to home media as made or used literally in that moving target known as 'home'" (143). The controversy and legal proceedings that ensued after the release of "*Star Wars* Kid" highlight the complexities, in the realm of creativity and consumption, of the "home movie" in the age of the web. Athough Raza was the producer of the images (recorded using "public property"), there is no indication that he wished to share it or release it in any way. Rather, until the aforementioned interview in 2013, it is apparent that Raza, unlike other videomakers whose home movies have gone viral over the years, maintained a firm distance from the circulation and controversy that followed.

From how it looks to how it can look

In his article, "Snapshots 'r' Us: The Evidentiary Problematic of Home Media," Chalfen (2002) focuses primarily on the still image, arguing that "a particular version or notion of evidence is the driving force coercing humans to produce and accumulate collections of personal pictures—to participate in a social process of home mediated visual communication" (141). He suggests that home media operate as a kind of database for people/users, a record of "how they look" (141), and that evidence is central to any underlying justification for why people make visual records of themselves, their private spaces, other people, personal moments, and events. In her examination of digital photography, "Digital Photography: Communication, Identity, Memory," José van Dijck (2008) acknowledges that "[i]n the analogue age, personal photography was first and foremost a means for autobiographical remembering" (2). However, she notes a shift in the relationship between image making and the concept of memory in the contemporary, digital era: "[t]he function of memory reappears in the networked, distributed nature of digital photographs, as most images are sent over the wires and end up somewhere in virtual space" (3). Van Dijck's reflections are particularly useful to my analysis of the processes of digitization, manipulation, and virtual distribution, and how these affect the questions of personal documentation that are fundamentally associated with

the "how it looks" of home media. Addressing the question of the impact of the digital manipulation of amateur still images—an area which I maintain is key to an understanding of the consequences of the digital manipulation of the amateur moving image—van Dijck points out that, "[u]nderlying this is the recurring issue of control versus lack of control ... electronic processes allow for greater manipulability, and yet the flipside is that pictures can also be easily manipulated by everyone with the appropriate toolbox" (3). Van Dijck's observations can be usefully applied to the moving image in the age of Web 2.0, in that, while it seems likely that Raza, in all his adolescent naïvety, simply did not think beyond the recording of his (supposed) *Star Wars* impersonation, the act of recording itself would have significant ramifications. Although the level of manipulation to the original tape can only be speculated, it is clear that the pranksters did extensively edit it to ensure that the basketball footage would not overshadow the "main event" of Raza. Its release in this new form and the controversy that ensued generate a debate about the concept of control and evidence and, indeed, raise larger questions of ethics and the authority of personal, private memory. It is apparent, then, that the notions of personal control and creation, with which the amateur moving image has long been associated, become problematized in an age when the boundaries between the individual and the interactive are increasingly blurred. Indeed, to circulate the home movie publicly opens up the possibility of a transition from individual to shared memory. To distribute the home movie globally, and amid the current mashup culture that the digital turn has inspired, as in this case, is to catapult it into popular culture and collective memory, as well as to make it accessible to the possibility of an endless amount of derivative creations. Furthermore, the distribution of "*Star Wars* Kid" via participatory media spaces and its further manipulation by other amateur creators with access to a contemporary media toolbox deepens the debate and opens up issues of collective creation and consumption. The "how it looks" of home media has now become the "how it can look."

On the question of the "how it can look," one aspect of "*Star Wars* Kid" that is particularly interesting is the level to which it has been subjected to further editing. Countless amateur and professional manipulations (generally, spoofs or engagements with well-known pop-cultural artifacts) have arisen as a consequence of its global distribution and popularity. Moreover, the "how-to" video tutorials that it has inspired (to which I will refer in greater detail further on) can provide the professional/technical know-how that the amateur usually lacks.

Professionalization and amateur layering: "*Star Wars* Kid" as interactive home movie

Similar to other viral videos that have subsequently provoked multitudes of popular culture references,[9] since its initial circulation, "*Star Wars* Kid" has generated a significant number of parodies within various professional forms of media, to a degree that one could certainly discuss it as being one of the most parodied viral videos of all time.[10] This brings to light the fact that the areas of copyright infringement and indeed personal violation in the digital climate are somewhat boundless. Professional media corporations have the authority to make certain restrictions with regard to the (often free) distribution of their content; the amateur creator, for the most part, does not. The rather unstoppable nature of the state of being viral has thus, in many regards, exposed videos to a "free for all." Yet, how open-source should video-sharing websites be when a given upload has already been deemed illegal by its very existence online? While the rest of my discussion here will focus predominantly on the more technical aspects of the "*Star Wars* Kid" aftermath, in a bid to conceptualize the interactivity accessible amid digital popular culture, I also do so in an attempt to highlight how the question of ethics did not seem to play any role in the vast multiplication of the original recording, both in the realm of the professional and the amateur. Instead, the phenomenon of "*Star Wars* Kid," regardless of the psychological distress it caused and the legal controversy that followed the video's release, has been neutralized—by its association with parody—into everyday visual culture.

Perhaps the most famous traditional media rendition of it took place in 2006 on *The Colbert Report*, a satirical TV show in the United States: the host of the show, Stephen Colbert, parodied it by using the effect of chroma key compositing,[11] challenging the viewers to "fill in the gaps" of his fictional lightsaber battle. Further references to and spoofs of the video have appeared in other American TV shows, including an episode of *American Dad!* in 2005, and a *South Park* episode broadcast in 2008. Examples such as these highlight the fact that the dawn of the age of Web 2.0, which has facilitated the dissemination of home movies and "private" content to a global audience, has also inaugurated a new relationship between the professional media and the amateur. By borrowing the "visual code," to use Chalfen's (2002, 147) term, of the home movie, traditional media is now able to capitalize on a phenomenon of which it was not originally a part. Yet, while "*Star Wars* Kid" has become a symbol of professional media adaptation and parody, and thus a symbol of traditional media's capitalization on websites like YouTube—what was once considered to be "grassroots"—it is also, and I would argue most significantly, symbolic of the interactive capabilities of the amateur. As I will

discuss, the concept of amateurism has been re-appropriated not only by professional media's utilization of its formal qualities, but also by the practice of amateur interactivity, which stems (in a more indirect way) from professional media.

What I would call "amateur layering" is the process of nonprofessional media-makers manipulating media (and thus creating media) that was produced by another amateur. In this case, it refers to the amateur parodies and manipulations of the original "*Star Wars* Kid" recording. Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) is by its very nature interactive, and thus to use the term loosely here would not sufficiently cover the level of communication that operates amongst amateur videomakers. As Lev Manovich (2001) highlights, under the rubric of what he describes as "the myth of interactivity":

> modern HCI allows the user to control the computer in real-time by manipulating information displayed on the screen. Once an object is represented in a computer, it automatically becomes interactive. Therefore, to call computer media "interactive" is meaningless—it simply means stating the most basic fact about computers. (55)

Further to Manovich's argument on the primitiveness of the use of the term "interactive" in describing new media, it is also important to underline how merely watching a video online, without navigating, recreating, sharing, or commenting on it, is communicative on other basic levels. On YouTube, for instance, one's clicks and one's viewings transfer immediately to logs and statistics, which in turn affect the website's analytics, the video's view-count, the website's engagement with our preferences (as it "recommends" what we should watch next), and product advertisement according to our taste.[12] However, what Manovich (2011) considers to be "interactive application software" allows us to look beyond basic facts about the web, towards a more intricate (and indeed, more relevant to the current analysis) understanding of the possibilities of these networked spaces.

The notion of "Photoshopping," a technique to which the process of layering is intrinsic, derives from the fact that the Adobe-manufactured program to which it refers is "a software application that has become synonymous with 'digital media'" (Manovich 2011). Manovich refers interchangeably to the developments in both still and moving imagemaking when he notes how "contemporary media is experienced, created, edited, remixed, organized and shared with software." Going beyond the meaninglessness of basic computer "interaction" with a given home video (for instance, by simply viewing it, clicking on a hyperlink, or exposing oneself to first- or third-party data retrieval), I argue that the interactivity, and thus the novelty

FIGURE 22.1 *Training the Amateur: "Creating Basic Lightsabers in Adobe After Effects Tutorial" by "Steven Hayes," June 7, 2011. Screenshot. Captured 23 July 2013.*

of home moviemaking in the age of Web 2.0, lies in this process of layering. As Manovich notes:

> Many software techniques that simulate physical tools share a fundamental property with these tools: they require a user to control them "manually." The user has to micro-manage the tool, so to speak, directing it step-by-step to produce the desired effect. (Manovich, 2011)

Regardless of the medium (still or moving image), "a final composition is a result of [an] 'adding up' [of] data (technically, a composite) stored in different layers/channels/tracks" (Manovich 2011). The vast abundance of "*Star Wars* Kid" rendition (amateur) videos exposes the fact that what were once considered professional media tools—layer-based digital effects software like Adobe Photoshop and Adobe After Effects—have now become more readily available, either through lower prices, spin-off consumer programs, or, more problematically, illegal software downloads. Therefore, industry-level animation techniques such as rotoscoping, which is the process of compositing (or layering) animated effects over live-action footage (or, over other animated images),[13] and which has been used in a number of the "*Star Wars* Kid" parody videos on YouTube, appear to have become mainstream in the world of amateur digital videomaking. Moreover, the constant desire among the "community" to contribute to this phenomenon can also be attributed to the professional expertise that is spread through Web 2.0's wealth of "how

to" videos within the realm of digital compositing. Lightsaber rotoscoping tutorials—many of which appear to have been instigated by the popularity of "*Star Wars* Kid"—exist on YouTube in their hundreds, possibly thousands, and encourage videomakers to create as they watch by using digital manipulation tools such as Photoshop or After Effects. The ultimate result is a drive towards mimicking Hollywood effects, thus "professionalizing" the amateur videomaker. That is not to say that encouragement to "better" one's home moviemaking is in any way a new phenomenon; as Zimmermann (1995) has explored, postwar American amateur film magazines and manuals frequently offered advice and tips on how amateurs could "Hollywoodize" their productions.[14] However, in the digital era, as home media transforms from the "how it looks" to the "how it can look" through either individual creativity or co-produced layering, the "how it should look" blurs the divide further through new forms of professional-amateur interactive creation.

"*Star Wars* Kid": Interacting, authoring, consuming

FIGURE 22.2 "Star Wars *Kid Drunken Jedi," 2006. Screenshot. Captured 23 July 2013.*

In the case of "*Star Wars* Kid," countless amateur manipulations of the original video exist on YouTube alone, most of which are completely independent of Stephen Colbert's "green screen challenge." These adaptations range from the simple addition of music and voiceover, to the creation of various

accompanying narratives, to its digital insertion into well-known professional feature films, to the addition of *Star Wars*-like special effects. At the time of writing, the most watched of these, which was uploaded by "fantom81z28" in 2006 with the description "Star wars kid what else" (*sic*), is titled "*Star Wars* Kid Drunken Jedi" and has garnered over 12 million views to date. The video begins with the familiar trailer title of the Motion Picture Association of America, followed by the video logos of 20th Century Fox and Lucasfilm Limited. We then see a cut of Raza's original video, with added special effects to his golf club lightsaber. The 34-second video is interrupted by a *Star Wars*-like intertitle, and is concluded with a closing credit that cites inspiration by Raven Software (a U.S. video game developer) and reads "*Star Wars* Kid 2.0" in large font. While it is uncertain as to what the creator of the video was referring to when including the final caption (for instance, if this was merely suggestive of the pretense of a sequel), it draws immediate attention to the fact that the video could not have been created if it were not for the creator's engagement with the participatory and intermedial possibilities that the second-generation Web (2.0) offers (and, indeed, encourages by telling users to "Broadcast Yourself"). Similarly, videos like "*Star Wars* Kid – You Should Be Dancing" (uploaded by "xdarkfigure," 2006), "*Star Wars* Kid *Matrix*" (uploaded by "missymigs," 2006), and "*Star Wars* Kid VS Yoda" (uploaded by "AlexstrifePE," 2006) comprise digitally enhanced renditions, and draw upon professional media conventions such as intertitles, music, and references to popular culture. They also include allusions to feature films and flesh out short narrative accompaniments to the original (arguably narrative-less) video. While most mimic the (supposed) premise of the original video by science-fictionalizing it to a greater extent, other videos, like the self-explanatory "*Star Wars* Kid – Canoe" (uploaded by "3Dmud," 2007), digitally reposition the "main character" out of context in order to create non-*Star Wars* content.

Such manipulations of amateur footage by other amateur producers expose a number of important trends and consequences of image-making in the age of Web 2.0. Useful to an understanding of this is van Dijck's (2008) conceptualization of the digital still image, as something that

> is part of [a] larger transformation in which the self becomes the center of a virtual universe made up of informational and spatial flows; individuals articulate their identity as social beings not only by taking and storing photographs to document their lives, but by participating in communal photographic exchanges that mark their identity as interactive producers and consumers of culture. (7)

It is interesting to note how her observation on "consumers of culture" is reflective of many of the creators of "*Star Wars* Kid" parodies, in that they

acknowledge how much the video has already been reproduced, but still articulate a desire to be included in the phenomenon. For example, "3DMud," creator of "*Star Wars* Kid – Canoe," states: "i was bored yet again with nothing to do; so thought id have a crack at one of the star wars kids shorts. If I had known it was going to be this popular I would have made more effort" (*sic*). Also, it is important to highlight here how plagiarism within this "community" is flagged,[15] suggesting that the creation of these videos is often taken seriously. As home video becomes more networked, and as technology advances and democratizes what was once considered to be professional creativity, the level of control with which the amateur moving image is inherently associated begins to weaken. While it may be problematic to suggest that YouTube is or ever was a purely grassroots movement, it is "first and foremost a cultural space of community building and shared experiences," as one commentator reminds us (Müller 2009, 136). Thus the home movie, and specifically, the "*Star Wars* Kid" parody phenomenon, once distributed on the networked spaces of Web 2.0, has the potential of infinite layering—with each manipulation to the original video (or, indeed, with each manipulation to a manipulation) permitted distribution in its own right, territorialized in its own virtual space, and "authored" through the use of the figurative patenting of accompanying text, channel, and username.

Conclusion

Snickars and Vonderau (2000), in their pioneering anthology on the phenomenon of YouTube, have argued that "ordinary YouTube users hardly see themselves as part of a larger community" (12). This is plausible on the basis of the (very general) "90–9–1" rule, which indicates that roughly 90 per cent of the traffic that websites of this nature generate is that of non-creative, non-interactive (in the productive sense) users, 9 per cent are occasional contributors, and just 1 per cent contributes regularly.[16] Yet, since its launch in 2005, YouTube has encouraged us to broadcast ourselves, and to share individual creations and memories in the formation of collective spaces. As the world's largest moving image depository, the notion of YouTube as archive is accentuated by these spaces. However, as we have seen, the supposed amateur revolution—for which Web 2.0 has been both criticized and celebrated—can dislocate the home movie in both its aesthetic and formal qualities and its traditional social and cultural contexts, bringing to light new, more multifaceted questions of the problematics of control and of the professional/amateur divide. That is not to say that the effects of the digital turn in sharing media denote a complete counteraction to the "authenticity" of (and the notion of "evidence" underlying the process of) still

and moving imagemaking in the analogue era. For instance, in her discussion of the image's presence on a "networked environment which changes its performative function upon each retrieval" (2008, 17), van Dijck argues that the image's contemporary association with the potentials of digital manipulation does not mean that it has become a less powerful tool. She maintains that it is "equally vibrant" (3), acknowledging that what we have now is the possibility of a system of (sometimes unintentional) archiving that results in the transition from memories "of life" to memories "for life" (18). The ideas of memory and evidence attached to image documentation, in all of its forms, have therefore been expanded, broadened by the possible shifts from individual to archived (and thus collective) to interactive.

While I have argued that "*Star Wars* Kid" as an amateur video is a significant example of these technical shifts, under the rubric of the displacement of the conventions of personal, private media-making, I have also sought to highlight how its ensuing phenomenon exemplifies the novelty of this contemporary process of amateur layering, signifying a substantial move away from the primitive beliefs of the communicative nature of new media artifacts, towards a more definitive understanding of the interactive faculties that the contemporary web permits. Yet, the ethical issues at the heart of this video (and its countless derivatives) accentuate the disturbing reality of the normalization of cyberbullying in popular culture. Although Andrew Keen has argued that the demise of the professional/amateur divide is debasing culture and thus eradicating the existence of a "professional, intellectual class" (2009b), his "warning" about the "the fate of individual liberty in the networked age" (2011) is applicable to my argument of the professionalization of the amateur, in terms of the ethical and ideological ramifications of this interactivity. As other commentators have noted, it is difficult to avoid ambivalence in addressing the open-source revolution when one considers the loss of authority—through the capitalization of amateur videos brought about by media (social and otherwise), marketing and software companies—to which this process exposes the home movie in its traditional form. Furthermore, one must remain critical of the ongoing aggravation that the "*Star Wars* Kid" parody videos are potentially causing, given the archival status of the landscape in which they will, most likely, continue to multiply and, quite possibly, be stored "for life" (van Dijck, 18).

Notes

1 Christian Fuchs (2008) also simplifies: "a web dominated by cognition is web 1.0, a web dominated by communication web 2.0, and a web dominated by cooperation web 3.0" (125–6). At the time of writing, ideas

on the latter remain to be articulated largely in the future tense, and are heavily linked to the notion of a "web of semantics." See Stuckenschmidt (2012).

2 The notion of YouTube as "archive" is reflected by its statistics: http://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html

3 As Nick Salvato (2009) notes, "he brings into bold, even hyperbolic, relief the assumptions that color the thinking of much more subtle and responsible writers who take up the terms 'amateur' and 'professional'" (69). Also, Keen often refers to himself as the "antichrist of Silicon Valley." See Keen's Twitter bio, for instance: https://twitter.com/ajkeen

4 As of 2006, it was the most viewed video of all time (Conway 2008, 69).

5 As of May 2013, this version had been viewed over 27 million times.

6 Statistics from The Viral Factory and TubeMogul show that the video has been viewed over one billion times since its upload (Wei 2010). It is, of course, important to note that achieving exact numbers is impossible, when taking into account offline viewings in particular.

7 *Maclean's* ran an English-language version of this interview in its printed and online magazine.

8 See Snider and Borel, 2004; Campbell, 2005; Solove, 2008; Moore et al., 2010.

9 Such as: Noah Kalina's "Noah Takes a Photo of Himself Every Day for 6 Years" from 2006, and Chris Crocker's "Leave Britney Alone" from 2007.

10 At the time of writing, K-pop artist, PSY's music video for his single, "Gangnam Style" (released in July 2012), seems to have taken its place, being the most watched YouTube video of all time (with well over one billion views to date) and arguably the most media-parodied viral sensation of recent popular culture.

11 "Chroma key compositing" refers to the process of post-productively applying special effects to two videos or images by layering them together. Using a green screen to achieve the desired effect is the most well-known and popular method, given its difference in hue to the color of human skin.

12 Also, it is worth noting how navigating a given web space can contribute to any invested marketing companies retrieving data from one's session.

13 Perhaps the most famous professional examples of digital rotoscoping are Richard Linklater's *Waking Life* (2001) and *A Scanner Darkly* (2006).

14 As Zimmermann (1995) notes: "By the 1950s photography and family-magazine writers inscribed technical manipulation and a slavish conformity to Hollywood narrative visual logic as the goal of amateur production. Hollywood style, as a natural and innate form of common sense, inoculated home movies, protecting them from chaos" (122).

15 See, as a recent example, the following comment posted under "*Star Wars* Kid Epic Remix" ("XtremeLeapFrog," 2012): "You stole this and rehashed it. Where is the original remix off of ebaums from 2004 do you have it?" (*sic*). Though, it is worth pointing out that any reproduction of the original images is plagiarism—and, indeed, harassment—in itself.

16 See Jakob Nielsen's (2006) "Participation Inequality" theory.

23

Towards Mobile Filmmaking 2.0: Amateur Filmmaking as an Alternative Cultural Practice

Max Schleser

Over the last decade, mobile documentary filmmaking has evolved from an underground and art-house practice into an egalitarian moving-image one. In an international context, mobile films and mobile documentaries or "mobile-mentaries" (Schleser 2011b) can provide access to filmmaking to a new generation of filmmakers. For communities, mobile devices have the potential to engage audiences globally. This chapter will analyze current developments in mobile filmmaking in the context of amateur filmmaking and vernacular video. Moreover, it will examine mobile filmmaking devices as a cinematic technology through user-based histories and explore transformations in the current mediascape by investigating the role of the user in creating new aesthetics as an alternative cultural practice. With reference to the International Mobile Innovation Screening 2011 and 2012, both of which took place in the New Zealand Film Archive in Wellington, this chapter will discuss the multiple vectors that drive the constant innovation process in mobile filmmaking (Schleser 2011a; Schleser 2012b; Schleser 2011c; Schleser 2013). By means of showcasing projects that were produced with local communities, film enthusiasts and amateurs, the chapter will illustrate the prospects for producing localized content by, and for, active and engaged twenty-first-century citizens.

The understanding of cinematic technology is linked to a multiplicity of perspectives and the objective here is to examine an alternative

interpretation of mobile filmmaking. Investigating the use of mobile video technology outside of the industry-dominated discourse, particular emphasis will be placed on the role of the user and of amateur media in providing alternatives. The model developed by Punt (2000) in *Early Cinema and the Technological Imaginary*, which examines the cultural construction of cinematic technology in early cinema, provides a framework within which the consensual understanding of mobile (phone) videos in the contemporary mediascape can be examined. It is indeed pertinent to compare the development of camera technology in the first 20 years of the last century to the first generation of mobile phones: the first 16mm cameras, such as the Cine-Kodak, filmed in 12 frames per second, which is comparable to most first-generation camera phones. The growth of the industry and the evolution of formats have also impacted on filmic forms: from the capturing of actualities to the production of short and then feature-length films. Similarly, mobile technology is now having an effect, as we will see, on formats and aesthetics. In contrast to the last century and the development of early cinema, however, the notion of the user in mobile filmmaking is now becoming more significant, with the omnipresence of mobile devices. This chapter uses Maya Deren's (1965) concept of the figure of the amateur to offer new perspectives on contemporary debates and definitions of the pro-d-user, as outlined by Wintonick (2004), and by Edgerton (2007) in his analysis of user-based history.[1]

Defining amateur technology

In her 1965 article "Amateur Versus Professional," Maya Deren provides a case for independent and experimental cinema, reminding the reader that the "very word amateur—from the Latin 'lover'—means one who does something for the love of the thing rather than for economic reasons or necessity." The amateur has "one great advantage which all professionals envy him, freedom—both artistic and physical … The most important part of your equipment is yourself: your mobile body, your imaginative mind, and your freedom to use both" (45). It might be suggested here that mobile filmmaking epitomizes what Deren posits, for it has the potential to free itself from industry constraints and standards. Indeed, one can expand and adapt Deren's theories to conceptualize the specific mobile aesthetic, as I will do in this chapter. Deren's definition of amateur, I argue, provides an alternative understanding of the role of users in the contemporary mediascape.

In his *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History Since 1900*, David Edgerton (2007) suggests that focusing an analysis on technologies of the everyday can "shift attention from the new to the old, the big to the

small, the spectacular to the mundane, the masculine to the feminine, [and] the rich to the poor" (xiv). He discusses "technology-in-use" and a "user-based history" and I would argue that mobile filmmaking positions itself as mundane rather than spectacular, capturing the everyday rather than narratives. Within the arena of video production, the first-generation mobile-video 3gp format seemed to be an underdog; it was not considered as a serious format by the industry, and was not even defined as a filmmaking tool by its inventors (i.e. before the switch from 3gp to mpeg 4 / Quick-time video formats). But, as Edgerton argues, "history is changed when we put it into the technology that counts, not only the famous spectacular technologies but the low and ubiquitous ones" (212), and so a consideration of mobile technology is particularly pertinent. In a contemporary mediascape where mobile video is ubiquitous, low-tech mobile devices can provide access to (documentary) filmmaking tools that can produce alternatives to the high-definition industry formats. Indeed, as the categories of user and producer break down, the distinction between industry and amateur has become increasingly "pixelated." Edgerton's work emphasizes the role of the pro-d-user, arguing that he/she can contribute to the bigger picture of user-based histories, which can, in turn, provide an understanding of media (in this case, mobile filmmaking in the context of amateur media) through an analysis of technology in use. A user-based interpretation allows one to argue for the formation of alternative practices to the industry formats of mobile video, such as Mobisodes (Hart 2009) or Mobbywood (Kharif 2005) productions. While Mobbywood is applying industry filmmaking standards and conventions to mobile filmmaking, the entertainment industry and network providers are, in turn, conducting research in the area of mobile TV standards (such as DVB-H) that could change the peer-to-peer approach of mobile media through a one-way modern mass-media dissemination model. Amateur media can provide an alternative to these industry forms and hierarchical discourses.

Beyond the discussion of users becoming content producers, it is pertinent to consider the question of users contributing to the creation of new cinematic forms, something that is revealed in the mobile aesthetics that has emerged from 2004 onwards. Considering parameters of social change and transformation, amateur media is a significant framework within which the development of mobile media as an emerging cultural practice can be illustrated. Writing in *Culture*, Raymond Williams (1981) uses the terms "emergent" and "residual" to describe changes in the domain of cultural production: residual, to refer to the work of earlier decades, as an alternative that was established in the last century; and emergent, to describe new work that uses different technologies and has different motivations. Williams classifies three types of external relations in cultural formations: specializing, alternative, and oppositional. The term "alternative," as Williams argues,

indicates that "the long and complex history of the relations between cultural producers and their material means of production has not ended, but is still open and active" (118). Being aware of the significance of cultural production in relation to access and the means of production, Williams's research is sympathetic to the idea of change from within the mediascape. Mobile media users are not only creating stories, but are also contributing to the formation of new aesthetics and innovation in the field of documentary filmmaking. As a model of mobile-mentaries in the mediascape, one could therefore apply Williams's notion of the alternative category to mobile filmmaking, one that provides "alternative facilities for the production, exhibition or publication of certain kinds of work, where it is believed that existing institutions exclude or tend to exclude these" (70).

Mobile media provide a clear case for a user-based intervention in the mediascape. Innovation in this field is emerging through a user-based exploration of technology, in which the user has the capacity to contribute to the definition of alternatives. In this context, one can explore the potential of mobile phones for documentary filmmaking, and suggest that amateurs and users can contribute to the creation of new formats. As Birchall (2008) notes, the elements one sees in documentary films on the World Wide Web are "being reconfigured into new, often fractured and fragmentary forms, mostly by amateurs" (282). While discussions about user-generated content focus on the production of content in the form of actualities, mobile filmmaking can be related to the development of a filmic form. Here, Deren's writing, which refers to the avant-garde experiments of the 1940s, and Hans Richter's (1949) reflections on the documentary genre, are relevant. Writing in 1949, Richter observed:

> Twenty years ago most documentary films, like those made by Ivens, Vigo, Vertov and Grierson, were shown as avant-garde films on avant-garde programs. Today the documentary film is a respected, well-defined category in the film industry alongside the fictional entertainment film. (34)

Both Richter and Deren drew connections between the documentary form and avant-garde practice: as Richter noted, the avant-garde filmmakers in particular were using the documentary film form in an innovative way and were exploring the boundaries of the documentary format. In a similar context, pro-d-users are today creating aesthetics as cultural formats that allow expression of one's agency. As noted above, the formation of an alternative mobile-mentary category is not driven by the industry, but by the users and their mobile creations. The pro-d-users are creating aesthetics as cultural formats that allow an expression of one's agency. In the context of this current discussion on vernacular creativity one can point to YouTube

personalities such as lonelygirl15 or skate video producers, all of whom may be regarded as examples of how the audience as pro-d-users is increasingly contributing to the mediascape. These examples illustrate that users can create, and contribute to, not only content productions, but also the design of new formats and aesthetics. As with documentary film in the 1920s, and the avant-garde practice of the 1940s, mobile-phone video work is situated in a non-defined space explored by users who are introducing the "pixel aesthetic" into the mediascape through a bottom-up approach. It is in this sense that a connection can be made between new mobile filmmakers and Maya Deren's notion of the "amateur":

> Physical freedom includes time freedom—a freedom from budget-imposed deadlines. But above all, the amateur film-maker, with his small, light-weight equipment, has an inconspicuousness (for candid shooting) and a physical mobility which is well the envy of most professionals, burdened as they are by their many-ton monsters, cables and crews. Don't forget that no tripod has yet been built which is as miraculously versatile in movement as the complex system of supports, joints, muscles and nerves which is the human body, which, with a bit of practice, makes possible the enormous variety of camera angles and visual action. (45)

The field of mobile-mentary filmmaking offers a platform to explore transformations that can provide alternative accounts and produce change within the mediascape. So-called amateurs are less concerned with applying filmic conventions, standardized filmic languages and filmic grammar and, through this freedom, they have capacities to create new practices that are set free from these constraints.

User-based histories: The case of mobile media and mobile filmmaking

If the development of cheaper, more accessible cameras facilitated the development of amateur filmmaking, mobile filmmaking and, more generally, mobile devices can also be positioned on this timeline of so-called amateur technology. The mobile camera phone as a ready-made consumer product was foreshadowed by a DIY tool and application created by Philip Kahn in 1997 (Maney 2007). This semi-professional prototype illustrates how one user appropriated existing technology in a novel way. By combining a digital camera, laptop, and mobile phone, Kahn created a new technological capacity that predated the introduction of an industry prototype. The advances in handset

technology in the 1990s, and "the growing importance of personal expression through consumer electronics (including phones as fashion items)" (Thompson 2005, 99), have transformed the mobile phone from an exclusive technology for an executive elite to a mass-produced customized product of contemporary consumer culture. Within the communication industry, the mobile phone with photographic capacity was invented as a marketing tool in Japan. In 2000, Sharp launched the first mobile phone equipped with a camera: the SH-04 for J-Phone (Turrettini 2003). It instantly matured from a gadget to a standard feature in mobile communication (Rubinstein 2005, 113). In 2004, 150 million camera phone units were sold worldwide (O'Keefe 2004) and nowadays smart phones are the cameras most used to upload photos on the image-sharing website Flickr. As O'Keefe predicted, a "rapid adoption of camera phones worldwide will generate 29 billion digital images captured this year." With continuous trends in individualization (Beck 1997), globalization, and mobilization of markets (Appadurai 1990), lifestyles and consumer culture (Featherstone 1991), the elusive and fragmented consumer now has access to communication and information media. While the technology originated from the science labs, the application of the mobile device is undoubtedly driven by users. Here, text messaging provides a model for the presented case of mobile video.

> Kltr is the clln of sgns spcfc to a sosIET. Evry tek hs a kltr of its own. A kltr cn b hrd 2 undrstand 2 outsdrs. Ther is no bttr illstrn of ths thn txt mesgs. Txt msg ws an accident. No1 expected it. Whn the 1st txt mesg ws sent, in 1993 by Nokia eng stdnt Riku Pihkonen, the telcom cpnies thought it ws nt important. SMS – Short Message Service – ws nt considrd a majr pt of GSM. Like mny teks, the *pwr* of txt – indeed, the *pwr* of the fon – wz discvrd by users. In case of txt mssng, the usrs were the yng or poor in the W and E. (Agar 2003,105)[2]

The potential of mobile video can also be illustrated by considering the numerous mobile-mentaries produced in the last number of years, which are screened at mobile film festivals internationally.

The first edition of the International Mobile Innovation Screening, in 2011, featured the program categories "Mobile Experiments," "Mobile Bodies," "Connectivity," "Mobile Movement," and "MobiWood." The submissions from numerous countries and each continent demonstrate that mobile filmmaking is increasingly a global phenomenon. In order to provide a record of the contemporary developments and trends in mobile filmmaking, and to make the content accessible, MINA, the Mobile Innovation Network Aotearoa, produced a DVD (Schleser 2011c) and eBook (Schleser 2013).[3] Both the MINA publication DVD, as well as eBook, and the screening programs themselves, showcase a rich array of new viewpoints and mobile visions.

FIGURE 23.1 *MINA International Mobile Innovations Screening 2012, The New Zealand Film Archive Ngā Kaitiaki O Ngā Taonga, Wellington, NZ.*

MINA creates interactions between people, content and the creative industries. MINA also showcased the mobile work produced with local communities and young adults in Brazil, Germany, Russia, and Australia. MINA's partner festivals—Ohrenblick Mal in Germany, Mobilefest in Brazil, HeART Beats in Russia—as well as MINA's work in New Zealand (Allan 2012), demonstrate initiatives and collaborations with the next generation of filmmakers. The economic reality for film enthusiasts and filmmakers in Brazil or Russia means that video/HDV cameras are less accessible than in most western countries. In this context, mobile devices provide an alternative to mainstream media and allow young people in Ekaterinburg to produce bike and skating videos for their peers, and new filmmakers in São Paulo to produce experimental short films. A similar educational approach is facilitated by Ohrenblick Mal in Germany. The festival works with the JFF Institute for Media Education in Research and Practice in Munich, which collaborates with schools and has introduced the mobile phone as an educational tool in the curriculum. Young people learn to use mobile phones as a creative tool to express themselves in a meaningful way, at the same time sharing their work online in order to inspire their peers. The joint screenings and showcases at the international mobile film festivals provide not only a forum for the discussion of their work, but also a celebration of creativity. Another example illustrating the potential of mobile filmmaking for combining educational activities and social impact in communities is the project Reel Health (Ong and Tigo 2010), which is featured on the MINA DVD and was presented at the MINA International Mobile Innovation Screening 2011. Using mobile devices, ten medical students in Tanzania filmed what they described as "health crises" in a country where there is only one doctor for every 30,000 people (in contrast to one for every 300 in the U.S.) (Schleser 2011a).

Continuous innovation is demonstrated through aesthetic refinement and the current development of the challenging of the linearity of film (production, distribution, exhibition) towards establishing transmedia and Web 2.0 models of mobile video dissemination. With the advancement of network and social media, mobile filmmaking thus illustrates the potential of alternative distribution mechanisms outside the commercial environment. Keen (2007) has explored this development in *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet is Killing our Culture*. While broadly endorsing a conservative model of protectionism, which seeks to maintain a traditional mechanism of distribution and the attendant discourses of control and power that reinforce the separation between amateur and professional, even he acknowledges that "web 2.0 participatory media is reshaping our intellectual, political and commercial landscape" (1). The earlier argument pointing at the freedom of amateur media illustrates elements of connectivity and sociability in mobile

FIGURE 23.2 *MINA International Mobile Innovations Screening 2011 and MINA DVD, The New Zealand Film Archive Ngā Kaitiaki O Ngā Taonga, Wellington, NZ.*

filmmaking, which account for a development towards mobile filmmaking 2.0 (Schleser 2012a). Writing in *Making is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity, From DIY and Knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0*, Gauntlett (2011) explores notions of engagement and connection within social and physical environments. He argues that making is connecting, and studies the social meaning of creativity. Gauntlett refers to Web 2.0 as a metaphor, "for any collective activity which is enabled by people's passion and becomes something greater than the sum of its parts" (201). Relating this to the bigger context of contemporary digital culture, he refers to a "making and doing culture" in which creativity is understood as a process and a feeling (17). He bases his ideas and conceptualizations on the philosophies of craft and argues for a shift in emphasis within creative projects: away from a concern with outcomes towards a consideration of process: "Everyday creativity refers to a process which brings together at least one active human mind, and the material or digital world, in the activity of making something which is novel in that context" (76). The point is that "amplified slightly, it leads to a whole new way of looking at things, and potentially to a real political shift in how we deal with the world" (18). For mobile filmmaking 2.0, the notion of agency is a key element, one that can lead to "a transformative impact on the

sense of the self" (117) and that, in turn, can help to transform digital culture in the twenty-first century.

Amateur media and vernacular video

Within the history of cinema and filmmaking one can identify examples that illustrate how the professional industry imposed standards in order to restrain the impact of amateur or community-based film productions. In 1938, *Amateur Ciné World* emphasized the potential of the more mobile 16mm cameras in comparison to the industry standard of 35mm format (see Winston 1996, 67). Yet professional documentary filmmakers ignored the 16mm format, which was associated with the private sphere and was therefore deemed inappropriate for public sphere or public education in the style of Grierson (see Winston 1996, 66). Winston argues that "it was attitude not technology which held 16mm back professionally in the 30s" (67). However, in the 1930s, some agitprop groups and ethnographers did call attention to the 16mm format, proclaiming that "The 16mm camera in the right hands is no toy; sub-standard is the only way out" (quoted in Winston 1996, 67). This case can be compared to mobile video in the contemporary mediascape. Jeffrey Bardzell (2007) points to the aesthetic maturation of amateur multimedia ranging from video podcasts to machinima and Flash animations to user-created metaverses.[4] He argues that amateur media are a cultural phenomenon and criticizes how the academic community has thus far failed to acknowledge the emerging aesthetics of amateur multimedia. Bardzell's research is based on multimedia authoring tools; he positions amateur productions in the field of popular culture. He draws on a cultural studies approach and human computer interaction, because "neither one on its own is sufficient to understand the continued development of the phenomenon" (15). Bardzell refers to creativity as an "act of discovering and extending the hidden logic of technological media forms" (20) and suggests that creativity "contributes to discourses about the world and our place in it" (20). In his study of multimedia authoring interfaces, Bardzell concludes that amateurs can produce culturally meaningful productions, often creating a forum for shared interests that are frequently linked to parody and comedy (31).

However, Bardzell does not acknowledge the possibility of amateur tools being used beyond these emerging formats or that amateur media has the capacity to produce alternatives to industry-dominated discourses and standards. He describes amateur YouTube videos as "personal, confessional, and intimate. They are not cinematic and often not even narrative. YouTube … is the locus of the birth of a major new nonnarrative genre of film, perhaps the first since the documentary" (27). This model transcends any technological

deterministic account as it is the creative practice and application-in-use that define the innovative elements in the cultural production, and not the technological sophistication of the media technology.

In addition to Bardzell's writing on amateur media one can also refer to Judi Hetrick's (2006) research on amateur video. Hetrick argues that the expression "vernacular video" "can be used as a new and more precise category to describe nonfiction videos made by untrained camera operators who attempt to realistically reflect life around them" (78). Here she refers to the contribution of community groups to the production of public, social, and civic documents; she argues that community members rarely employ professional filmmaking conventions. The phenomenon of community media productions can now be shifted to the next level through social media and open-source applications and CC (creative commons) licensing laws. On the other side of the media spectrum, communication and entertainment industries are striving to exert control over the mobile content sector and are aiming to introduce standards that oppose the openness and community-based approach to media production of the users.

Mobile filmmaking

In "Aesthetics of Mobile Media Art" (Schleser et al. 2009), I explored the possibilities of mobile media in the domain of art and media practice. As I argued, an original aesthetic emerged that can be seen to characterize mobile filmmaking in the years 2004–8, one described as a pixelated, low-resolution mobile screen aesthetic.[5] "To understand mobile video projects, it is important to evaluate them in a category of their own … Through the emergence of mobile devices as a tool for creative production, an alternative space for the creation of artwork has emerged" (Schleser 2011b, 119). It is significant to point out that mobile filmmaking outside the industry discourse provides the creative freedom to explore moving-image productions for self-expression beyond the realm of the media industry. "Mobile devices make the mundane interesting, the everyday confronted, providing a new lens for viewing the world through a new camera vision" (119). The first generation of camera phones, which were equipped with 2-megapixel cameras, have been updated by smart phones with 5-, 8-, or 41-megapixel sensors capturing native Quicktime full HD video. Since the introduction of these camera phones, which provide video formats that are comparable to industry standards of video production, the film and creative industries have begun to recognize the potential of mobile filmmaking. As the MINA 2012 screening demonstrated, mobile devices were attached to weather balloons or bicycles and captured the experience of filmmakers in novel way. Mobile filmmaking is

less concerned with video standards, and privileges instead an exploration of the imaginative storytelling.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the development of mobile filmmaking towards a cultural practice. The pro-d-users are creating aesthetics as cultural formats that allow an expression of one's agency. The so-called film-lover (a.k.a. the amateur) illuminates the possibilities for change that can arise in the mediascape, so that the professional standards can be understood and defined as technological imaginary. In the age of HD video, amateur media can provide an alternative to the mainstream consensual understanding of (mobile) video technology in the mediascape. The value of amateur media productions transcends the area of video, film, and moving image if one considers models of twenty-first century citizenship. For public institutions (museums, educational environments, etc.) embracing mobile filmmaking provides a fruitful framework to expand upon and create new work in alternative spaces and participatory contexts. As the (film) industry has little interest in recognizing these prospects, mobile filmmaking has developed an alternative cultural practice. This transformation was foreshadowed by emerging mobile aesthetics that are related in this chapter to the discourses of experimental filmmaking. The argument developed by Maya Deren, which illustrates the creative freedom of amateur filmmaking, is still valid and can be applied to mobile filmmaking. Through embracing the transformation of audiences in a changing media ecosystem, creativity can also be analyzed through new characteristics and qualities. The development towards mobile filmmaking 2.0 illustrates that alternative accounts exist outside of the professional media environment. With the omnipresence of mobile, wireless, and ubiquitous devices and digital networks as part of twenty-first century cities, amateur filmmaking can be embedded into twenty-first-century citizenship. Positioned outside the industry discourse, mobile filmmaking can illustrate innovative capacities relating to the sociability and connectivity of mobile video. Using digital networks, amateurs can connect globally, producing alternative discourses about themselves and their environments. As this chapter has illustrated, amateurs can create new aesthetics, which as cultural formats demonstrate one's agency to create representations and contribute to global dialogues in alternative spaces.

Notes

1 In a master class titled "New Media: Frontiers in Documentary" given at the 17th International Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam, the Canadian documentary filmmaker Peter Wintonick introduced the conceptual model of the "pro-d-user," which relates to "the blurring roles of the user and the producer (pro-d-user); the related political impact of subversive and interactive use of new technologies" (Blassnigg 2005). The pro-d-user continues to blur the boundaries of previously distinctive categories of producer and user.

2 Jon Agar (2003) also provides a translation into everyday English of the section titled *Txt Msgs*:

> What is culture? Culture is the collection of signs specific to a society. Every technology has a culture of its own. A culture can be hard to understand to outsiders. There is no better illustration of this than text messages. Text messaging was an accident. No one expected it. When the first text message was sent, in 1993, by Nokia engineering student Riku Pihkonen, the telecommunication companies thought it was not important. SMS—Short Message Service—was not considered a major part of GSM. Like many technologies, the *power* of text—indeed the *power* of the phone— was discovered by users. In the case of text messaging, the users were the young or poor in the West and East. (177; emphasis in original)

3 MINA eBook on iTunes: http://bit.ly/eBookMINA

4 "Machinima," a term conflating "machine" and "cinema," refers to the use of 3D computer graphics rendering engines to produce animated films. "User-created metaverses" are virtual worlds in which avatars represent characters, e.g. *Second Life*.

5 "The Keitai Aesthetic is related to the mobile experience in three ways. First, on the visual level, it is expressed through the digital pixel composition … Second, the Keitai aesthetic is expressed in the way mobile phones have impacted body language, and hence the way the body experience is incorporated in the screening and viewing process using mobile devices ... Finally, the Keitai aesthetic is connected to the qualities of a state of 'inbetweenness'" (Schleser et al. 2009, 103).

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