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The expanded intimacy: Home movies transcend the media. *Dad's films*, an *art-practice-as-research* project

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Abstract

For years home movies have not been the object of academic study, since they have been seen as a minor cinema. Little could we imagine that family cinema would leave the private space to become part of the mass media. Expanded intimacy. Recovering family films is an increasingly frequent exercise, in order to give it artistic projection and new cinematographic representations. Likewise, Unesco recommends safeguarding and preserving amateur audiovisual records and family films as cultural heritage that is part of our history and testimony of an era and its customs. This chapter deals with the topic of home movies and makes a case study: Dad's films. Places in memory, applying the art practice as research methodology. And finally, it opens the way for further research that addresses the difference between family movies of the 60-80s of the last century and those of today.

Keywords

Home movies, amateur cinema, cinema, new audiovisual formats, Social Media Live Streaming, (SMLS), audiovisual heritage, memory, private-public, performance art, art practice as research.

Título

La intimidad expandida. El cine familiar trasciende a los medios de comunicación. Dad's films, un proyecto de art practice as research

Resumen

Durante años las películas caseras no han sido objeto de estudio académico, puesto que se han visto como un cine menor. Poco podíamos imaginar que el cine familiar saliera del espacio privado para formar parte de los medios de comunicación de masas. La intimidad expandida. Recuperar películas familiares es un ejercicio cada vez más frecuente, a fin de darles proyección artística y nuevas representaciones cinematográficas. Asimismo, la Unesco recomienda salvaguardar y conservar registros audiovisuales amateurs y películas familiares como patrimonio cultural que forma parte de nuestra historia y es testimonio de una época y sus costumbres. El presente capítulo trata el tema del cine familiar (casero o doméstico), y hace un estudio de caso: Dad's films. Lugares en el recuerdo, aplicando la metodología art practice as research. Y, finalmente, abre el camino para una posterior investigación que aborde la diferencia entre las películas familiares de los años 60-80 del siglo pasado y las actuales.

Palabras clave

Cine familiar, cine amateur, cine, nuevos formatos audiovisuales, Social Media Live Streaming, (SMLS), patrimonio audiovisual, memoria, público-privado, performance art, art practice as research.

1. Origin and development of home movie formats

In 1909, 35 mm film was finally recognized as the international standard. Years later, standard formats intended for home use began to appear: In 1922, Pathé Frères launched the 9.5 mm film format; in 1923, Eastman Kodak introduced the 16 mm format as an alternative to 35 mm; and in 1932, Standard-8, with a width of 8 mm, was created to become the support for home movies par excellence. It started with the 16 mm film and 7.5 meters long, in such a way that it was filmed on half of the film and once the roll was finished, it was turned around and the other half was filmed. The roll was then taken to the laboratory and after development the film was cut lengthwise to obtain a coil 8 mm wide and 15 m long. This format allowed laboratories to use the same machinery as they had been using for the 16 mm format, thus cutting costs and making it more competitive than other formats.

In the early 1960s, as an evolution of 8 mm film, the Eastman Kodak company developed the Super-8 format. No longer derived from 16 mm film, the perforations of this stock are smaller and located in the centre of the frame.

In the early 1980s, the first video cameras appeared, a system of recording images that was to change the landscape of home movies. In 1985, Sony introduced Video8 to replace its own Betamax tapes and JVC's VHS tapes. In 1989, the Sony Hi8 (8 mm bandwidth) was released with PCM digital audio stream and an enhanced resolution from the 200 lines of Video8 to 420 lines (560 x 480 pixels in digital terms). Some 120-minute Hi8 video tapes could also be used in Digi-tal8 cameras, but at 60 minutes as the level of quality in digital storage was higher.

Today, although some of these formats continue to be used along with home cameras that offer great image quality, most home movies are recorded on smartphones, as indeed are some films projected in cinemas.

2. Characteristics of home movies



Image 1. Frames from the home movie shot by my father in Super-8 format. *La barraqueta*. 1967

Home movies are a close relative of the family photo album. When the first home cameras appeared, the desire to immortalize the family and to tell its story in first person became a real possibility. They were 16 mm, 9.5 mm or Super-8 films, shot by a member of the family who captured the rest of the family and their lives – births, baptisms, first communions, birthday parties, holidays, etc., key moments in the life of the family, their rites and rituals.

Guerín (1998) likens home movies to a “garden”, a paradise, a place free of crises and routines. It shows the joyous, festive side of life, a life of comfort and happiness. When we watch these films, it seems that time stands still; they have the “quality of ‘embalming time’, the beautiful epithet applied by Bazin.”

Home movies are immediately recognisable with their blurred, out-of-focus images; brusque, sweeping camera movements; shaky camera and incorrect framing; sudden, visible cuts; long panoramas and abuse of zoom; changes in the lighting or lack of light; children colliding with the camera and adults crossing in front of it; no speaking, just music. Repetitions are given to emphasize its beauty. It would seem that the fact of tiring the viewer is not important, but that the person who films, gives priority to what seems beautiful to him, showing it over and over again. The roles played by the characters are treated from an entirely affective point of view and this prevails over any concerns related to frame or filming. Objects are used to identify or validate a place, just as tourist postcards do, stereotypes of the place where the action is filmed; the same goes for maps of the world and globes.

We could say that home movies have an aesthetic quality that has little in common with that of the cinema itself. They are made to be watched by the family and discussed in the intimacy of the home. It is a cinema that has undergone little to no editing. They are simply films that were shot, sent to be developed, and then projected at home. They have no coherent narrative structure.

Home cinema has no need to produce a narrative structure or a coherent construction, because these already exist in the memory of the participants. All that is required of the film is to rekindle memories, to allow families to relive past events together. (Odin, 2010, p. 45)

It is worth drawing a distinction here between amateur cinema and home movies. Amateur cinema, although devoid of any commercial interests, seeks to resemble professional cinema, while home movies have no such pretensions. All the traits I have identified above show it to be a cinema full of defects, that does not meet the cinematographic standards and therefore, we would be talking about a "badly made" cinema. However, as Cuevas Álvarez (2018) recognises, “it is these very ‘defects’, its formal characteristics, that give it that air of authenticity, of non-commercial cinema, that provides that sensation of truth that no other cinema has achieved” (p. 130).

Home movies underwent a transformation in the 1980s with the popularization of video, a medium that overcame the limitations of celluloid, the high costs of development and which

allowed a film to be viewed immediately. This marked the beginning of the boom in homemade images, and tapes that could be reused. However, despite these changes, the specific qualities of home movies were maintained, which according to James M. Moran (2002), allows us to speak of the unique identity of the “domestic mode”, which extends beyond the format.

To conclude this section, today home movies constitutes part of our cultural heritage. UNESCO has designated October 27 as World Day for Audiovisual Heritage, which also takes into consideration the work of those who archive and protect this world heritage. Moreover, it proposes investigating and identifying amateur audiovisual recordings and family films, as well as raising awareness among the owners of these films of the need to adopt basic preventive conservation practices. In a similar vein, Keldjian (2015), in the “Cine casero” project, emphasises an additional component to that of conservation, which is projection, which she states “favours the sharing of these images and their circulation...” (p. 25).



Image 2. Frame from the home movie shot by my father in Super-8 format. New York. 1969

3. Uses, recovery, revision, recycling and new representations. Home movies transcend the media

Recovering home movies has become an increasingly frequent exercise, with the objective of giving them artistic projection and new representations in contemporary cinema, both in documentaries and in more experimental spheres. In this appropriation of domestic cinema, several paths have been taken: 1) filmmakers and artists that use home movie techniques when shooting their own works; and, 2) the recovery of home movies material (the so-called *found footage*). The latter is a narrative technique used by artists in their productions and is

frequent in horror movies and in *mockumentaries*. Here, we find two different modalities: a) films in which the home movie is fictitious but is presented as if it were found footage; and, b) films, works of art and video art that use home movies as the basis of the piece. In both cases we are dealing with a genre that draws inspiration from the literary technique of the found manuscript. Within modality b), a distinction should be drawn between filmmakers who recycle other people's domestic material and those who recycle their own family material, so that their work is autobiographical in nature. This is the case of the project I describe in this chapter.

Finding abandoned rolls of film or footage is a kind of fetishism, a desire to discover stories or great hidden truths – a search for our origins. Home movies handle time in a much more intimate fashion, lifting family members out of the stream of time and rescuing them from death. An example of just that is the feature film *Ulysses' Gaze* (1995) by the Greek director, Theo Angelopoulos. The film, set in the Bosnian war, tells the story of a Greek filmmaker who returns to his hometown on a personal journey in search of three undeveloped reels of film, containing the innocent gaze, the first gaze, of the pioneers of Greek cinema. As such, it is also a journey to the roots of cinema.

If I may draw a parallelism, family movies may also be a journey into oneself. Phototherapy uses family photos to evoke therapeutically relevant memories, feelings and information that are unconsciously contained in the images, which help patients understand the place they occupy in their family. With more reason the movies, due to their quality of moving images, can project scenes that may shed even more light on such questions. "Photo therapy allows subjects to connect with parts of themselves in ways that words alone cannot fully represent or deconstruct" (Weiser, 2010, p. 3). Here we can include memory recovery work in patients with senile dementia or Alzheimer's; in which case, if you have your own family films, these can provide the patient, especially in the initial stages, the possibility of remembering and exercising their biography with the objective of recovering his identity¹

A further example of a film that plays with found footage, in this case a fictitious finding, is Daniel Myrick's *Blair Witch Project* (1999). On October 21, 1994, Heather Donahue, Joshua Leonard and Michael C. Williams entered the Burkittsville woods in Maryland to shoot a documentary about a local legend, the "The Blair Witch". They were never heard of again. A year later, the camera they used for filming was found and the tape revealed the terrifying events that led to their disappearance.

1 "The Narrator-Narrated: The Participatory Social Documentary and the Expanded Documentary as possible tools for the representation of identity in people affected by memory loss", is the title of the doctoral thesis by PhD student Virginia Fuentes (PhD Program in Communication, University Pompeu Fabra, 2021–2023) of which I am the director. The study points to the possibility of using patients' family films, where they exist, as material for cognitive stimulation in their search for identity and the improvement of their memory.

Tren de sombras (Train of Shadows) (1997), by José Luis Guerín, is a film of fiction and yet it could be classified as non-fiction, experimental cinema or an *essay film*. It is a tribute to home movies. What Guerín does is reconstruct home footage, invent the characters and record them with the characteristics of family cinema. Yet, according to Cuevas Álvarez (2018), “This invention does not have a strictly narrative purpose, but rather seeks to place domestic cinema as a paradigmatic mode where the most essential features of cinema are brought together, at the moment when it has become centenary” (p.137). In 2003, I interviewed the director of photography Tomás Pladevall for my doctoral thesis. I had dedicated a section to family cinema and I showed him some of my family’s films and we also talked about the characteristics of home movies and his cinematography for the film, *Train of Shadows*. Next, I will expose some contents of the Pladevall decalogue (Obradors, 2003) for said feature film according to the precepts of domestic cinema. Pladevall, classifies different sections: Handling, Framing, Panoramic, Actions, Presence of the filmmaker.

As characteristic features we can highlight:

“Improvisation even within the same scene. Artistic close-ups or reframers. Often medium shots with plenty of space above. Some ankle shots. Fixed camera and the characters entering or leaving the frame. An empty frame held for some time, waiting for an entry or an action that finally occurs. A hand, arm or something that comes between the camera and the characters. Some blurring in some shots. Panning at erratic speeds. Irregular camera pans following a motion. Panning from characters (coming out of frame) to landscapes. Groups of characters that do not fit in the frame and the camera hesitates. Some 360-degree panoramas. Some camera sweeps. A mother who turns the head of a child towards the camera or places it in the frame. Characters looking at the camera. Reflections in the windows”.

In the line of true found footage, we can highlight the feature film *My mexica bretzel*, by Nuria Giménez Lorang (2019) that recovers Super 8 and 16 mm films from her grandfather and with that material builds a fictional story. Gimenez Lorang, elaborates the intimate diary of a woman, Vivian Barret, who reflects on life and her own existence after the Second World War and illustrates it with the home recordings of her husband León, a rich industrialist in the 40s and 60s of the century. last. A journey through the best of Europe, from the welfare of wealthy families. Lorang enters us, without speech or dialogue, into a world that we do not know if it is real or fictitious.

Another case of domestic cinema that has come to light, thanks to the documentary directed by José Luis López-Linares with a script by Javier Rioyo, and which can be considered the first autobiography in images, is that of Madronita Andreu (daughter of Doctor Andreu). Madronita spent her life filming not only her family, but also her travels (in the United States, Africa, India, Jamaica, Italy, and Switzerland, among others). She started out making home cinema but over time ended up becoming an amateur filmmaker, displaying a natural talent for filming and a sure composition. Indeed, her films constitute a veritable historical legacy of the 20th century. The film, entitled *Un instante en la vida ajena* (A moment in the life of others)

(2003), took the director seven years to complete, between viewing and editing the 150 hours of film shot by Madronita and today housed in Barcelona's *Filmoteca*.

In relation to artists who use home movies for their works, it would be worth highlighting artists such as María Ruido (1967) who uses archive material (or found footage) combining it with images of her own production that have resulted in works on the construction of memory, body and identity. Carlos T'Mori (1970) works in non-regulated audiovisual, researches on the domestic, and identity and its distortions. Peter Tscherkassky (1958), works exclusively with found footage. His cinema is experimental, he develops 35mm films and intervenes the material to question the conventions of narrative cinema.

The intention here is not to make a complete inventory of these filmic practices – this is not the objective of this chapter – rather I have noted a few examples to illustrate the different uses of home movies in documentary, film and artistic practices²

4. Dad's films. Places in memory. An art-practice-as-research project

Motivated by the interest and fascination for family cinema, in 2018 I plan to develop a project to explore this subject, using the art-practice-as-research methodology³. From the hegemonic investigation, I would have studied family films, solely from the analysis of their narrative, whether formal, from semiotics, hermeneutics or other disciplines or methods. In this case, in addition to studying the expression, the message, the transcendence and the purpose, I have developed two artistic actions to approach the subject from experience. I designed a study from the art practice as research methodology that included two actions: a performance and a participatory event. In undertaking a performative act, I was accepting that this was an approach that would enable me seek out other codes, not necessarily those of the word, as a platform for addressing my object of study. It would be like letting my mind be guided by uncoded signals – “Can we put aside the certainties for a while and listen and hear about those things about which we know nothing?” Taylor, (2017, pp. 23-24) – trying to interpret meaning in terms of rites. According to Diana Taylor, performance teaches us to envision knowledge in other ways. Thus, I proposed a study of family cinema through representation.

Years ago, I had transferred some of my father's films to DVD, so I started the project because of my family's cinema. The sample is made up of five films: *La Barraqueta*, New York, Atlanta, Mexico and Peru, and *Llafranc*. I visualized the sample, and looked for the variables and meanings common to all of them. The recurring variables that I found are the following: sea, living on the beach, exile, nomadism, travel.

2 In this regard, see Efrén Cuevas Álvarez, (ed.) (2010).

3 On *art-practice-as-research methodology*, see, Matilde Obradors (2020).



Image 3. Workflow event </CODE±NOWNESS>, Livemedia SMLS Fabra i Coats project *Dad's films. Places in memory*. Matilde Obradors.

In 2019, within the framework of the studio/event, workflow set installation, Social Media Live Streaming (SMLS), </CODE±NOWNESS>, carried out by Livemedia at the Fabra i Coats creation factory (Barcelona), I developed a project entitled, *Dad's films. Places in memory*.

I designed a workflow to examine the theme of my family's home movies that consisted of 1) a performance on the beach, broadcast on social media live streaming (SMLS); and, 2) a presentation and projection of the project in the Fabra i Coats creations factory's multipurpose room, live before a public and retransmitted by Social Media Live Streaming (SMLS)⁴. For both actions, I previously prepared a script.



Image 4. Shot of streamed performance art. Matilde Obradors, 2019.

⁴ The performance on the beach, as well as the event at Fabra i Coats, were broadcast via Periscope, Twitter live and the Livemedia platform.

1. Performance broadcast via social media live streaming (SMLS).

Performance streamed from one of the places in which my father's films were frequently set, the beach, and a recreation of a campsite, the trip and the elements that have most caught my attention ever since I was a child – food and family photographs. A representation of the past, to talk about the family, emulating my father's home movies. The representation, of the representation of the representation. I become the voice of the places in memory.

I simulated what was a small campsite, evoking a sense of nomadism, with a camping table, on which I laid out all the foods I associate with my grandmother, salt-cured tuna, fish roe, round red *ñora* peppers, etc. Sitting at the table, I replicated my grandmother's life, I ate and talked about her. I understood the bond that united us. I would have liked to have heard her voice. She lived half the year on the beach in a cart. My mother's brother, exiled during the dictatorship in Perpignan, also ended up spending part of the year on the beach at Saint-Cyprien, in a wooden hut built on the sand, with a fence and a garden, the water collected with a hand pump. They called it the *barraqueta*. There, every summer, Spanish exiles in France and Mexico used to meet up to visit my aunts and uncles. At night, they would sit in the sand garden, telling stories about the civil war. All this is captured in the film, *La barraqueta*, filmed by my father. Thus, it is discovered how families, although they separate from the original family nucleus, continue to repeat and reproduce models.



Image 5. Frame from the home movie shot by my father in Super-8 format. *La barraqueta*. 1967.

2. Presentation in the Fabra i Coats creation factory

Presentation in the multipurpose room of the Fabra i Coats creation factory on three giant screens, where images of the beach performance described in point one and fragments of my father's films were projected. This event was open to the public and was also broadcast on Social Media Live Streaming (SMLS).

The public was seated as if in a cinema and I, to the right of the three screens, explained where the idea for the project had come from, the characteristics of family home films in general and those of my Dad's films in particular, and opened the debate on how they were recorded family movies were made in the '60s and '70s, and how they are made today. At that time recording was expensive and you had to wait for it to be developed. My father used to say that he "recorded without haste", he immersed himself in a kind of ritual, with the awareness of perpetuating a historical moment.

I explored this memory, the analogue montage of films my father made with his Moviola. My child's eyes fascinated by family scenes suspended in no time. Dazzled by the films of my father's travels in the Americas. Especially those to New York and Atlanta (1964). I also discussed with the public the meaning of the live streaming of this intimacy, of these places in memory that I had decided to visit. And we spoke of just how little home filmmakers could have imagined that their films would be of interest to people outside the family circle.



Image 6. Projection in the multipurpose room of the Fabra i Coats creation factory.



Image 7. Presentation and colloquium in the multipurpose room of the Fabra i Coats creation factory.

5. Conclusions. Expanded Intimacy

Family cinema (shot between the 1950s and the 1980s), because of its domestic condition, prioritized the affective over the professional. It is a cinema that has very specific characteristics, traits that it continued to preserve even with the appearance of video in the eighties. The fact that all home movies tend to resemble each other means that, starting from the variables of a movie camera and a dearth of cinematographic knowledge, the outcome is always the same. What should be stressed however is that, by dint of practice, some of these home movie filmmakers learned how to make cinema and their films improved.

Among the characteristics of home movies described in this chapter, variations have been detected that are a function of the degree of amateurism shown by the filmmaker. In the case of the films analysed in the sample for this study, it is evident that the filmmaker (my father), does edit his films on his Moviola, a clear demonstration of an amateur's trait, that is, that he wishes to make good cinema and is no mere *aficionado*. What is more, he tries to make sure not to bore his viewers, so he seems to be seeking to reach an audience wider than that of his immediate family. He is aware that he is making a social historical document and assumes the responsibility that goes with that task. In other words, we are not only talking about a playful, eminently home-made gaze – films made for the family's own consumption – but rather there is a desire to achieve social and collective permanence. Consequently, we can speak of

degrees of amateurism within home cinema, which will vary its condition as “badly made” cinema.

One of the conclusions endorsed by specialists that is repeated when qualifying family cinema and that has been verified in the present study, is that the sensation of truthfulness is greater than in professional cinema, probably due to that air of imperfection that makes one think of spontaneity and therefore authenticity.

However, this is something of a contradiction since it is a cinema that seeks to show only the family’s good side, the “garden”, where everything is contentment and no one has any worries. It does not present the family’s true private life. This characteristic seems to be the unspoken agreement that is repeated in all family home films of that time. It is curious, then, that family cinema gives this sensation of veracity, when it is far from being completely honest and does not even seek to be authentic.

What no one could have imagined is that “badly made” family cinema would one day break through the barriers of the private to become part of the mass media. This fascination with family cinema, as a starting point for other audiovisual works, is closely related to feelings of curiosity, comparable in that respect to the feelings generated by a found manuscript or treasure map. As well as being documents that appear to be authentic and true, they are testimonies that could reveal a new, previously hidden, truth. They are also documents that play with time, by both containing it and retaining it. They stimulate feelings of nostalgia, take people out of the current of time and defy the death of our kith and kin. And finally, they serve as testimonies of an era; they are a window on past customs, lifestyles, fashions, and more.

I am able to confirm that performance is a useful tool for reflecting on a subject as it means a complete immersion in that subject via representation, and it enabled me to contemplate other points of view and to formulate new questions.

My work has been a reflection on family cinema, one that allowed me to reflect also about myself, my family and the place I occupy in it. I have found answers but, at the same time, it has found many new questions. I have drawn conclusions that, due to their personal nature, I have not thought fit to capture in this chapter. I have verified that watch own home movies helps cognitively reintegrate insights and can improve personal aspects. Therefore, it is highlighted that family cinema not only has recycling uses for films, documentaries or artistic expression, but also that it is a great tool for therapy. And it shows how convenient it is to combine psychology and communication to advance self-awareness. Going through the images of the past and returning to the origins was Freud’s maxim, –based on the history of religions and cosmogony–, to achieve healing.

A follow-up of the investigation is proposed regarding how family films were recorded from the 50s to the 80s of the last century and how they are recorded now. From the outset as a

starting point, we could analyze a difference: in those years, the best face of the family was presented, “the garden” to which Guerín refers, in which there are no worries or conflicts. In current family cinema, even when the happy part of families is also reflected, there is no fear in showing the most conflictive part, ridiculing family members or even showing arguments. Under the influence of programs like Big Brother or the reality shows in which anything goes, crude ways of showing intimate and private spaces emerge. And even, we could say more, the conflict is provoked and promoted to attract the viewer’s attention. All these modes of voyeurism have permeated the domestic practices that circulate through the networks. Above all, taking into account that videos are currently being made showing one’s own house, House Tour, or showing the products in a box that has been received, YouTube unboxing, or videos about what do I carry in my bag? Intimacy comes out of its private environment to be shown without shame.

A paradox emerges here that is worth reflecting on: we can see that fashion is what we all follow to differentiate ourselves from the rest. Moving images take on and perpetrate invisible collective forms that help us feel unique. On these invisible and common forms, our differentiation is based, the search for our own identity. As I have already observed in previous research, the norms of the mainstream, its stereotyped reiterations, sneak into all the practices of users in the digital age, like invisible canons. In future studies, it will be possible to delve deeper into this aspect.

Finally, there is one point about what we agree on studying and verifying different researchers, and that is that many of the audiovisual practices that exist today and which are attributed to the digital age and the social networks, have their bases in practices invented and rooted in previous centuries. The study of audiovisual hybridizations (Obradors, 2021), reveals that these practices date from the 1920s and with the appearance of video and artistic manifestations in the 1960s, they are the precursors of audiovisual transdisciplinarity. In the same way, it is worth mentioning the work of Freixa and Redondo-Arolas, (2021) in which it has been possible to verify that,

Many of the practices that are now recognized as belonging to hyperconnected photography are based on learning initiated during the last decades of the 19th century through postcards, visiting letters, and the social circulation that they provoked. (p.135)

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