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Home Movies Then and Now

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A Thesis

in

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of

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ABSTRACT

Home Movies Then and Now

This study examines the practices and discourses of small gauge filmmaking and attempts to account for the longevity and persistence of the medium. Emphasis is placed on the perception of the home movie as the primary implementation of amateur filmmaking technology. Some of the issues addressed are: the ideology of the family as perpetuated in the home movie making aesthetics of the 1940s, '50s and '60s, the use of the home movie as a code within narrative commercial feature films, and the artistic and political claims made for small gauge filmmaking. The conclusion examines present-day discourses and the positioning of super 8 filmmaking as a revolutionary or radical practice.

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Introduction

In 1965 Kodak introduced a new camera gauge and system known as super 8. One of the earliest television ads for super 8 features a skydiver jumping out of a plane, loading a cartridge of film while free falling and then filming his descent. Seconds before landing, he sheds his parachute throws the camera in a clear plastic bag and continues to film a tropical underwater panorama as a smiling blonde woman waves at the camera. All this, of course, was to underscore how fun and easy super 8 filmmaking could be. Super 8 promised to be bigger and better than any amateur film gauge before it.

The introduction of super 8 was an attempt to boost lacklustre sales of amateur film equipment. In contrast to regular 8, this gauge came with a bigger frame size, better film stock and an ultra-convenient cartridge. The new cameras were small and easy to use, accessible and affordable. The cheapest model cost less than thirty dollars and a roll of film less than two. The 'point and shoot' simplicity of super 8 attracted thousands to the joys of filmmaking, and by the time that Kodak added sound in the 1970s, super 8 was the amateur filmmaker's medium of choice.

"They're instant loaded. They're super 8, so anyone you give one to will get such bright movies he (or she) will think he's (or she's) the greatest."¹ So reads a 1968 advertisement for a Kodak Super 8 M12 camera. Yes, even women can make movies! Anyone could make a movie and many people did - home movies, countless numbers of them. However, even before super 8 arrived, what was considered acceptable home movie subject matter was well defined; family get-togethers, trips to far away places and smiling families. The history of super 8 is inseparable from home movies, and synonymous for many.

There's no doubt that by the mid-1980s super 8's popularity had been eclipsed by the ubiquity of video. The tool of choice for documenting domestic rituals is now the camcorder. It's replaced the amateur film camera on vacations, birthdays and baptisms. Home movie has become home video, but super 8 continues.² From the personal to the political, from recordings of the everyday, to elaborate narratives - these small gauge, low-tech movies still get made. Super 8 is not obsolete. What accounts for the longevity and persistence of small gauge filmmaking? The

¹ *National Geographic*, December 1968, 881.

² I am specifically interested in the non-professional film formats of 8mm and super 8mm. Video is a medium with a different aesthetic and political history, which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

search for the answer to this question was the initial impetus behind this thesis.

My original intention was to explore the numerous contemporary filmmaking practices other than the home movie that employ small gauge film technology and specifically super 8. However, the equation of small format filmmaking and the home movie was impossible to circumvent. The harder I tried to escape the home movie the more I was drawn back to it. It became apparent that the home movie was at the heart of small gauge filmmaking, I would have to grapple with its legacy before I could engage with present day filmmaking practices and discourses.

Home movie making emerged as a mid-twentieth century (1940s-1960s) leisure pursuit focussing on the domestic sphere. Contemporaneously, Marxist theorists were beginning to probe the political possibilities of film and to conceptualize the 'everyday' as a site of inquiry. Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer and Enzensberger offer theories regarding film's political potential, whereas Lefebvre and de Certeau interrogate the everyday as a legitimate sphere of investigation. A reading of the home movie phenomenon through Marxist media theories and amateur filmmaking aesthetic discourses in conjunction with an engagement with the 'everyday' suggests ways we can

understand the historical, cultural and political impact of small gauge filmmaking.

This inquiry into the significance of small gauge filmmaking and home movies is not without its precedents. A small, but growing, body of literature is exploring this terrain. One of the earliest endeavours was *The Journal of Film and Video's* special issue "Home Movies and Amateur Filmmaking" (1986) edited by Patricia Erens. It brought together various writings on the topic. This was in part a response to Richard Chalfen's call for the necessary study of the home movie in his article "Home Movies as Cultural Documents" (1982). Chalfen followed up on his own advice and published a study of domestic still photography and moving images in *Snapshot Versions of Life* (1987). To date Chalfen's chapter on home movies is still one of the most comprehensive studies of everyday home movie practice.

The relative paucity of writings on home movies and its position within the domestic sphere has lead to inevitable comparisons to domestic still photography. The most useful of these has been Julia Hirsch's *Family Photographs: Content, Meaning and Effect* (1981), while Annette Kuhn's *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (1995) provides a more personal, reconstructive approach to interpreting domestic images. Works such as

Roland Barthes *Camera Lucida* (1981) and Susan Sontag's *On Photography* (1979) have provided a critical basis from which to build a theory of how home movies function in society. In particular Barthes' book as well as some of his earlier essays on photography, such as "The Rhetoric of the Image" (1977), have helped me grapple with some of the issues regarding the public/private nature of home movies.

The connection between still photography, amateur filmmaking discourses and the home movie is brought together in Patricia Zimmermann's groundbreaking *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (1995). *Reel Families* is the only single-author book to date that has tackled home movies and amateur filmmaking. The approach of *Reel Families* is broad-based taking into consideration the ideological, technological, economic and sociocultural forces at work in the production of home movies and amateur films in the United States.

In France, a collection of essays edited by Roger Odin dealing specifically with the home movie was also published in 1995, *Le Film de Famille: Usage Privé/Usage Public*. Given it is the first book of its kind to be published in France, it is very introductory in nature. Essays tend to be descriptive rather than critical, outlining home movie practices and applications. For example, Marie Therese

Journot's "Le Film de Famille dans le Film de Fiction" engages with similar material that I take up in Chapter Two. Her essay however, is much more descriptive and functions more as of a cataloguing of films that have used home movie footage rather than an examination of cultural and political issues at stake.

The artistic uses of small gauge filmmaking have had less sustained analysis. Thus far no book-length study exists of artist's small gauge film production. Given the rise in interest in small gauge artist film post-1960, the paucity of writings can partially be explained by the continual alignment between the small film and the home movie. The 1980s saw one of the first attempts at addressing the production of artist driven 8mm and super 8mm films with J. Hoberman's curated show *Home Made Movies: 20 Years of American 8mm and Super 8 Films* at New York's Anthology Film Archives. Hoberman's curatorial essay for the show "Homemade Movies: Towards a Natural History of Narrow Gauge Avantgarde Filmmaking in America" articulated the shift from home movies to home made movies. During the 1980s he would be a consistent advocate for artist's small gauge work through his film criticism for the Village Voice, much of which has been collected in *Vulgar Modernism* (1991).

However, the defining moment for artist's small gauge film work (at least in the United States) may prove to be 1998 Museum of Modern Art/San Francisco Cinematheque exhibition and catalogue *Big as Life: An American History of 8mm Films*. An extensive curatorial project that spanned from February 1998 to December 1999, *Big as Life* aimed to "increase the visibility of 8mm film art through a program of exhibition, publication, and preservation."³ This film series and catalogue has begun to address the blindspot of artistic small gauge work. No doubt more needs to be done.

Interest in the 'small movie' by academics, curators, archivists and preservationists is increasing. Museums such as the Smalfilmmuseum (founded in 1985) in the Netherlands, devoted to the preservation and study of amateur films, is promising,⁴ as is the interest of private and public archives such as The Prelinger Archive in New York and The National Archives of Canada. It is within the context of these writings and the growing appreciation of small gauge filmmaking that this thesis is undertaken. While archival and museum interest in the home movie is exciting, I will examine some of the problems with how they conceptualise

³ Albert Kilchesty, *Big as Life: An American History of 8mm Films* (San Francisco: San Francisco Cinematheque, 1998).

⁴ The Smalfilmmuseum is a member of the Association Européenne Inédits (AEI) which published *Jubilee Book: Essays on Amateur Film* (1997).

and position the home movie, particularly in relation to the everyday and narrative feature films.

Home Movies Then and Now thus engages with the legacy of the home movie, its practices and discourses, how they have endured, or languished, transformed or persisted. This thesis suggests a reading of the home movie phenomenon through Marxist media theories and a conception of the everyday that will help unravel the evolving nature of aesthetic discourses of small gauge filmmaking. *Home Movies Then and Now* tracks the ideology of the family within mid-twentieth century home movie making aesthetics up to the 'radical' filmmaking discourses of the present day. Chapter One looks at the manner in which home movie making of the 1940s, '50s and '60s was a heavily prescribed practice dominated by the ideology of the family and idealized representations of everyday life. It explores the intersections of the cultural practices of domesticity and their filmic representations in the home movie. Chapter Two analyzes how those heavily defined home movies have engendered a film-within-a-film device for narrative feature films. A close reading of several commercial fictional films from the 1980s and 1990s illuminates how home movies within larger narratives have shifted in their use from an idealized version of the home movie to its representation as trauma. Chapter Three examines critiques of the home movie as the only use of

small gauge film and suggests other practices. Small gauge film technology is situated historically, culturally and politically to suggest new possible applications. In conclusion I will look at present-day discourses and the positioning of super 8 filmmaking as a revolutionary or radical practice.

One

Home Movies and the Myth of the Everyday

Film history has paid relatively little attention to those films created outside of commercial cinema. Home movies along with, medical, scientific, educational, and industrial films, have long been neglected and relegated to the margins of film study. These 'orphan films', as they have been coined by some, are now finding a place in film history as they become the objects of archival attention and academic consideration.¹ The preservation and study of home movies is beginning to garner interest amongst archives and museums who are turning to this genre as yet another form that preserves the past. The amateur film and the home movie specifically, is viewed as an ideal cultural document of everyday life. This chapter will examine the notion of the 'everyday' and the way that home movies typify the representation of the everyday life. My intention is to articulate how home movie aesthetics, particularly from the 1940s through to the 1960s, governed both what was filmed and how it was filmed to form an ideal

¹A three day symposium was held at the University of South Carolina from September 23-25, 1999 entitled "Orphans of the Storm: Saving 'Orphan Films' in the Digital Age". "The "orphan" rubric will be considered broadly, taking in all manner of "at-risk" films: newsreels, silent films, experimental works, public domain materials, amateur footage, advertising films, documentaries, and independent

representation of the everyday. I will demonstrate how home movies and home movie making aesthetics reinforce societal and cultural norms. These norms are based on the suppression of racial, sexual and class differences therefore rendering a narrow representation of the 'everyday' rather than make evident its heterogeneous complexity.

Although film is considered the most influential medium of the twentieth century, film preservationists have had to fight strenuously to have film recognized as an art in peril of being lost. The pervasiveness of film has made its ephemeral nature difficult to claim. Since the 1970s however, the preservation movement has made significant gains.² Stressing their cultural value, these gains have been most significant in the conservation of commercial narrative films. Public interest and archival support has been primarily motivated by the safekeeping of Hollywood narrative films. Celebrity figures such as directors Martin Scorsese, Robert Redford and Woody Allen, and film critic/television personality Leonard Maltin have aligned themselves with a movement determined to save America's

productions." *Film Studies Association of Canada Newsletter* (Volume 23, Number 2, Winter 1999) 23.

²For an overview of the film preservation movement in the U.S. see Tom McGreevey and Joanne L. Yeck. *Our Movie Heritage* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

movie heritage.³ These personalities have helped raise the profile and the money for preservation efforts. Archivists, preservationists and celebrities however have mostly neglected home movies. Belonging to the world of the everyday and the mundane, the need to preserve home movies is particularly difficult argument to make. Those interested in conserving the home movie have recognized that they must situate the need to preserve these films in relation to narrative fictional films.

Home movies, it is argued, are the opposite of the fictional film. Home movies are authentic documents of the everyday; they show life as it really was. The predominant rationale regarding the importance of preserving home movies is their transparency or truth-value. Unlike fictional narrative films, home movies claim to demonstrate 'reality' and show authentic life like it was. Again lending his celebrity status to the cause of film preservation, but this time advocating for the home movie, Leonard Maltin argues that

when we talk about saving movies, its not just saving Hollywood movies that's important, it's all kinds of movies: newsreels, cartoons, TV commercials, industrial films and home movies because they really are like a social history.

³ Again see *Our Movie Heritage* which emphasizes American feature films and celebrity supporters of the preservation movement. For example, see Leonard Maltin's preface.

What do people dress like? How do people act? What does it look like in a typical American backyard, not the way Hollywood saw it, but a real backyard.⁴

Maltin positions the home movie and narrative cinema in opposition, whereas the Hollywood film is a fiction the home movie is truth. I will shortly turn to the question that this formulation raises, in particular, whether the home movie is not itself a construction?

Yet the fervent belief in the ability of home movies to disclose truths becomes the basis upon which their value is established. The home movie is not only one means of examining the past, it is an ideal document of the past. As Micheline Morisset, archivist at the National Archives of Canada writes in reference to the need to preserve home movies:

Many will think how 'boring' but as a source of documentation about the daily life of individuals at a certain time and in a particular country, no documents are of greater value. They speak to us better than any book could ever do about the habits and the mores of a particular community at a point in time in a certain place, and all without any staging by a director or of the intervention of a producer concerned only with making money. Better than any photograph, they reveal the way people looked, lived and acted. They bring information we would have to gather from many different sources and reconstitute a way of life, a manner of being and the true

⁴ Leonard Maltin, interviewee *Keepers of the Frame* (Dir. Mark McLaughlin, US, 1999).

appearance of individuals caught in the course of sharing a few moments of their lives with us.⁵

Morisset's statement suggests that the amateur film, because it is uninfluenced by concerns of profit, is an uncorrupted document of truth. Again, the home movie is contrasted with commercial cinema. I am not arguing that home movies are historically insignificant, on the contrary, the amateur film is of vital importance, particularly in Canada. Given the paucity of films made prior to the establishment of the National Film Board in 1939 followed by the dominance of Hollywood cinema, amateur film is a crucial component of Canadian film history. What is at issue however, is the manner in which the truth and authenticity of the home movie is juxtaposed to the constructed narrative world of fictional films. In other words, the home movie is natural whereas the fictional film is cultural.

The 'naturalness' of the home movie operates to conceal its construction. It is seen precisely as true, real and authentic because there is no apparent fabrication. The home movie operates on a mythic level because it successfully masks the social and cultural processes that went into its making. In his landmark essay

⁵Micheline, Morisset, "Home Movies" in *The Archivist: Magazine of*

"Myth Today" (1957) Roland Barthes suggests that myth is a means whereby cultural and social processes are naturalized. Myth operates by making dominant bourgeois ideologies appear natural and normal. Rather than working ahistorically, myth is specific to social and cultural conditions. "Myths" Barthes writes, "are nothing but this ceaseless, untiring solicitation, this insidious and inflexible demand that all men recognize themselves in this image, eternal yet bearing a date, which was built of them one day as if for all time" (155). Barthes highlights the manner by which myths appear eternal, as well as self-evident. The home movie is presented as an apparent representation of reality, it has been naturalized, its construction erased and its authenticity emphasized. It is a constructed myth portrayed as authentic and natural.

The everyday as it is recorded in home movies is not an unadulterated, authentic transcription of daily events but a document suspect to societal constraints and pressures. If home movie making tells us anything about the past or the present, it can only do so if viewed as a cultural document, one affected by the circumstances in which it arose and subject to the societal and cultural

the National Archives of Canada (No. 108, 1995) 28-9.

norms that shape it. In his study of the popular uses of photography and film *Snapshot Versions of Life* (1987) Richard Chalfen points out:

We must not assume that people look at everyday life, or at their environment, in exactly the same ways that they look through their cameras when they produce home movies. The relation between the two "looks" or "constructions" is problematic. Home-movie content, however, reveals a carefully constructed and orchestrated view of a relatively happy and successful approach to life. In a sense, we have a native model of the way life *should* be. A culturally determined bias has selected retained or eliminated specific people, places, events, and things to produce "an orderly view of the world" (original emphasis).⁹

The home movie is a culturally specific view of the world. The everyday as it is presented in home movies is a carefully constructed rendition of life, not necessarily as it is, but as it is aspired to -- a mythic ideal of the everyday.

The ability to record the everyday was not necessarily a natural progression from the still camera but was envisioned by commercial interests as an opportunity to tap into the mass market of non-professional users. The home movie as a specific cultural form resulted from its development as a marginal film practice. From the birth of cinema, film equipment manufacturers had recognized the

potential of the amateur film market and introduced smaller gauge film cameras aimed at a mass market. Yet, the attraction of cameras and projectors was restricted because of their prohibitive cost. Kodak's introduction of their 16mm home movie making equipment in 1923 was one of their more successful launches but was still limited to upper class clients. It wouldn't be until the 1950s that cameras would begin to come within the reach of the middle and lower classes. Innovations such as better film stocks and lighter cameras developed for the war effort trickled into consumer bound goods. Home movie equipment was lighter and easier to use than ever before. Cameras were smaller and film stocks required less light.⁷ These technical advancements were matched with a drop in price that placed the home movie within the grasp of the expanding middle class. The home movie camera emerged as a mass-marketed commodity that provided a means to demonstrate participation in familial responsibilities by filming the

⁶ Richard Chalfen, *Film/Culture: Exploration of Cinema in its Social Context*, ed. Sari Thomas (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.1982) 130.

⁷ See Brian Winston, *Technologies of Seeing*, (London: BFI Publishing, 1996) for an elaboration on technical developments relating to film as well as Patricia Zimmermann's *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* particularly Chapter Four: "Cameras and Guns 1941-1949". (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indian University Press, 1995) 90-112.

family. Home movie making was an ideal way to spend leisure time.⁸

Leisure for the first time in the 1950s became a mass phenomenon. "There had never been anything quite like it before in the history of civilization"⁹ writes Karal Ann Marling in her study of 1950s America As Seen on TV (1994). Leisure was a 'classless' mass phenomenon brought on by the shortened workweek that created an abundance of 'free' time, but free time posed the threat of idleness and something had to be done with all those extra hours.¹⁰ Hobbies of all sorts flourished. Marling, paying particular attention to paint-by-number sets, concludes that participation in making "art affirmed one's full membership in American culture, a willingness to be part of an ongoing process of filling in the outlines of post-war society" (84). Taking part is exactly what people were doing and making home movies was another manner of partaking in the post-war reconstruction. Doing-it-yourself was just the sort of initiative America needed and many were heeding the call.

⁸ See Zimmermann 114-115.

⁹ Karal Ann Marling. *As Seen On TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press) 50.

¹⁰ Marling, 50-84.

1.1 Lefebvre and Leisure

Taking advantage of leisure and participating in it fully requires work. As Henri Lefebvre writes in his *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947) the "relation between leisure and the everyday is not a simple one: the two words are at one and the same time united and contradictory (therefore their relation is dialectical). Leisure - to accept the concept uncritically for the moment - cannot be separated from work" (29). Taking Lefebvre's notion of leisure and applying it to the home movie, it is evident that a contradiction arises, the home movie is both leisure and work. The home movie as a leisure activity can work to replicate societal and cultural norms, yet Lefebvre argues, that leisure presents possibilities that can be both enriching and impoverishing. All leisure is not the same. Lefebvre outlines several levels of leisure activity; one that is undifferentiated from global activity such as walking, then there is a passive leisure such as watching television and finally a leisure that produces active attitudes. These highest levels are "very specialized personal occupations, linked to techniques and consequently involving a technical element independent of any professional specialization (photography, for example).

This is a cultivated or cultural leisure" (32). Home movies would, along with painting, belong to the cultural realm of leisure.

In his discussion of the mass phenomenon known as 'Sunday painters' Lefebvre makes comments that are wholly relevant to home movie making. In describing cultural leisure, he argues that

at a very high level leisure transcends technical activity to become art. On this level it seems to be using a certain means of expression in order to re-establish a hold on life in its entirety. In this context leisure involves an original search—whether clumsy or skilful is unimportant—for a style of living. And perhaps for an art of living, for a kind of happiness (42).

Lefebvre posits this level of leisure activity as a potentially fulfilling pursuit in contrast to the alienating effects of everyday life. But in the manner that the conventional subject matter and style of the Sunday painter is confined to landscapes and realism, home movie making is similarly restricted by social rituals rather than technical variables. Although home movie making has the seeds of creativity they rarely, if ever, get sown.

Lefebvre's ideas about the collapsing distinction between work and leisure has its precedents. Frankfurt School theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, writing a few years prior to Lefebvre, envisioned the collapse of

leisure and work.¹¹ For Adorno and Horkheimer the 'culture industry', as it was represented by film and television, ensured that popular art was merely a means of consumption that could not be challenged or resisted, it represented an unprecedented extension into the realm of leisure. One of the 'mass deceptions' of the cultural industries was the illusion that there continued to be a distinction between work and leisure. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that entertainment had, through its combination of work and leisure, abolished the distinction between life and art, original and copy, real and fake, authentic and inauthentic. "Real life" Adorno and Horkheimer write "is becoming indistinguishable from the movies" (126).

The entertainment manufacturers know that their products will be consumed with alertness even when the customer is distraught, for each of them is a model of the huge economic machinery which has always sustained the masses, whether at work or at leisure - which is akin to work (127).

With regards to the home movie, what was proposed as a leisure time activity, the enjoyable recording of real life, had developed into a form of work.

¹¹ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*. Translated by John Cumming, (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1969).

1.2 Home Movies: Leisure as Work

If Lefebvre's hope that alienation could possibly be circumvented by engaging in 'cultural leisure' the home movie hobby craze of the 1950s would seem one site of such possible engagement. Yet, the home movie did not fulfil its potential as a liberating practice but rather developed into a practice that was confined and restrained by dominant ideologies and discourses. In *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (1995), Patricia Zimmermann indicates that

by the 1950s popular discourse in magazines and instruction books accentuated the social functions of amateur filmmaking as a commodity for use within nuclear families rather than its aesthetics. [...] It also refracted professionalism into private life as an end in and of itself—as a mirror image of the disciplined, skilled, coordinated world of work, enveloped and ameliorated by the leisure activities of the nuclear family. "Togetherness" situated amateur filmmaking as "home movies"—private films as confined diversion for the home.(113)

Zimmermann's study outlines the manner in which amateur filmmaking became home movie making--a practice that has the potential for public address and participation, becomes a privatized practice. Yet despite the possibilities of filming whatever one pleased in the privacy of one's own home, home movies suffer from a confounding similarity.

Non-commercial uses of amateur filmmaking equipment are surprisingly uniform.

The mere mention of home movies conjures up images of an endless stream of birthday parties, Christmas celebrations and smiling babies. In *Snapshot Versions of Life* (1987), Richard Chalfen argues that photo taking and filmmaking in everyday life is dominated by a home mode of production that is surprisingly similar. Home movies focus primarily, if not exclusively, on the domestic sphere of the private nuclear family. This mode of pictorial representation is what Chalfen calls the 'home mode', encompassing snapshot photography and the home movie, and referring to a "pattern of interpersonal and small group communication centred around the home" (8). Chalfen outlines the parameters of the 'home mode' and points to how home movies take on their apparent uniformity of content. What is considered proper content and behaviour is dictated by prescriptive rules governing home mode image production.

Chalfen portrays image making within the 'home mode' as a *Kodak Culture* populated by *Polaroid people*. "*Kodak Culture* will refer to whatever it is that one has to learn, know, or do in order to participate appropriately in what has been outlined as the home mode of pictorial

communication" (10). And "the term *Polaroid people* is used to provoke an inventory (or environmental "topography") of specific people, places, and things that regularly appear in the photographic collection" (11). In short, a model is proposed for ideal home movies, who is expected to make them, who is expected to appear in them and how. Both form and content is prescribed.

The delineation of prescriptive practices can most easily be traced to film production manuals that offer amateur filmmakers advice on technical and creative matters. The emergence of film equipment into the mass-market created users who had little idea about how to record moving images. Indeed, for the most part, users tended to replicate the images recorded with still cameras. This accounts for the overwhelming perception of home movies as banal images of stiff limbed people smiling awkwardly into the camera. Thus the emergence of manuals designed to offer advice to the filmmaker, these manuals have been commonly referred to as Do-It-Yourself (DIY)¹² or How-To-Do-It (HTDI)¹³ manuals. One of the best known series of these kinds of manuals was the *How to Make Good Movies* publications that were produced by Eastman Kodak from the

¹² Zimmermann, Chapter 5, "Do-It-Yourself: 1950-1962", 112-143.

¹³ Chalfen, *Snapshot Versions of Life*, 49.

1940s to the 1970s. These publications, along with the expanding use of small gauge cameras spawned an industry of magazines, books and articles dedicated to the instruction of home moviemakers.

What is striking about these manuals is the uniformity of the type of advice that is offered and the manner in which it is presented. Film scenarios, by and large, focus on the nuclear, white family. For example, the guide *Filming the Family* (1962) nicely outlines the kinds of ideas that dominated domestic filmmaking. Chapters include: "Filming Baby's First Year", "Films Featuring Toddlers", "Children of School Age", "Birthday's and Christmas Parties", "Holiday Films", "Hobbies", and "Film a Wedding". Home movie advice found in magazines and books unabashedly promoted the ideology of the white nuclear family in suggesting film scenarios that continually revolve around parents and children.

In the 1950s the family was the dominant unit of consumption. Social practices emphasized the family over other political or community relations. The family functioned as a unit, rather than individuals, which found its forms of leisure and recreation was itself. The particular atomization of the family of the 1950s had an appropriate metaphor in the nuclear fallout shelter. As

described by Susan Willis "the fallout shelter was already particularized, but on the somewhat larger scale of the nuclear family unit...families had to decide whether or not they would let their neighbours into their private shelters."¹⁴ A counterpart to the nuclear fallout shelter is found in the home movie. For example, in 1955 the Ryland family proudly asserted: "Shooting movies isn't a hobby with us - it's even more important. It's our way of remembering...we record our memories in motion and colour and store them in film cans for the future."¹⁵ This leads Zimmermann to conclude, "home movies, in this instance, were the family equivalent of bomb shelters for civil defence - a hedge against the insecurities of the future."¹⁶

From the early 1940s until the mid-1960s, the film camera in the home is seen primarily as a means to document domestic life and ritual and protect a family against an uncertain future. Both Chalfen and Zimmermann use instruction manuals as a means of examining the relationship between the discourse around home movie making and the actualities of the practice. Although some manuals

¹⁴ Susan Willis, *A Primer For Daily Life*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) 164.

¹⁵ Virginia C. Rylands, "We Make Movies for Remembering" *Woman's Home Companion*, Oct. 1955, 110-119. As quoted in Zimmermann.

¹⁶ Patricia R. Zimmermann. "Hollywood, Home Movies, and Common Sense: Amateur Film as Aesthetic Dissemination and Social Control, 1950-1962" *Cinema Journal*, No. 4, Summer 1988, 31.

made the claim that "movie potentialities are measureless"¹⁷

Chalfen notes that

we are again dealing with what 'could be' done—and not necessarily what is done. The list of topics that home moviemakers actually do record is not endless. The selection of topics that home moviemaker can make and the actual list he does make do not coincide. The actual list of preferred topics and themes is quite restricted and limited (1987: 61) (original emphasis).

Despite all the advice for staging films, writing scripts and editing, very few films bothered with any of this pre- or post-production. They merely shot the event as they saw it, later providing the narrative to explain any incongruous moments or non-linearity. Most home movies conformed to the parameters laid out in the instruction manuals.

The prescriptive scenarios laid out in how-to manuals for home movie making were, by and large, adhered to. Chalfen proposes that home movie subject matter generally falls into four categories: one, vacation activity; two, holiday activity such as Christmas and Thanksgiving; three, special events such as birthday parties; and four, activity centred around the home such as snowball-fights, and babies first steps (Chalfen: 1987, 61-62). Although home movies are considered as cultural documents worthy of study it is

¹⁷ Quoted in Chalfen, p. 61 from the Eastman Kodak publication *How*

important to note what home movies fail to show. There is considerable amount of screen time devoted to what is acceptable to see, people in their Sunday best hamming it up for the camera. Seldom is the camera present for events that do not qualify as 'happy'. There are rarely images of the sick and dying. Births are recorded, deaths are not. Commonplace occurrences like washing dishes or doing the laundry is not recorded. Bedrooms and bathrooms figure less prominently than do dining and living rooms. The possibilities of home movies are not endless but are restricted by subject matter and the filmic codes of amateur filmmaking.

Representing happiness is one of the driving forces behind the culture of home movie making. As quoted earlier Lefebvre describes 'cultural leisure' as an art of living, as looking for a kind of happiness. Lefebvre's search for happiness, however, is not the same search for the happiness that the camera seeks. Indeed, home moviemakers seek out the representation of happiness as indicative of fun times. Judith Williamson points out in her study of family photography that

in earlier family images it seemed enough for the family members to be presented to the camera, to be externally documented; but now this is not

to Make Good Movies (1966) p.54.

enough, and *internal* states of constant delight are to be revealed on film. Fun must not only be had, it must be seen to have been had.¹⁸

The idea of fun is paramount for home moviemakers. Not only is making movies fun, but they also capture fun on film. Advertisements for Kodak movie cameras from 1950s stress the fun and good times they guarantee. Its "Time to Have Fun"¹⁹ states one, another ad declares that you will have "wonderful movies right from the start...recording your family good times in all the action and color of life itself."²⁰ In the post-war period the need for good times is understandable, but the effect was a psychic cleansing of sorts, only good memories will do. Pierre Bourdieu's study of photographic practice amongst the general populace in France encounters this same phenomenon; the camera "captures exceptional objects, the 'good moments' which it transforms into 'good memories'."²¹

Home movies have an apparent uniformity in content because they tend to adhere to the recording of culturally established rituals. The rituals of the domestic sphere are representative of a very selective conception of the

¹⁸ Judith Williamson, "Family, Education, Photography" in *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986) 122.

¹⁹ *Maclean's Magazine*, May 12, 1956, 54.

²⁰ *Maclean's Magazine*, May 14, 1955, 35.

²¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990 c. 1965) 27.

everyday. Film scenarios presented in filmmaking books and manuals put forth notions of the ideal family. The ideal family and the ideal memory relies on the suppression and repression of those aberrant moments that do not make up 'good times'. Home movie advice of the 1950s uniformly operates on the suppression of the non-ideal. For example, the aged and the sick are conspicuously absent from film scenarios. The ideal norm established by the manuals is of a white, middle class family with at least two children, one of each sex. The parents exhibit ideal gender-role behaviour and children clearly enjoy every moment of their gender role socialization. Eastman Kodak's *How to Make Good Movies* (1966) suggests heavily gendered scenarios: "War in the Snow" feature a boys-will-be-boys scenario of a snow fight and "Laura's Seventh Birthday" presents Laura preparing for her birthday party - "Heaven knows, a young lady has to look glamorous on her very own seventh birthday" (59.)

The home movie asserts both the family and the roles of family members in movie making. Despite the miniature nature of many film cameras they were not toys, children were to be filmed, not filmmakers. Movie making suggestions include filming baby's first year; birthday and Christmas parties; holidays, etc. Children are 'natural' subjects for

the camera. As one manual points out, "l'enfant est souvent un acteur privilégié car il oublie vite la caméra pour retrouver son naturel."²² Filming children was fulfilling what was increasingly considered a parental duty, the documenting of a child's infancy and youth. This duty was to be undertaken by both parents, mother and fathers alike. If men dominated the professional sphere of filmmaking, the private sphere gave women (primarily as mothers) access to the tools of filmmaking. The camera was envisioned as a domestic technology that benefited the happiness and well being of the family.

Although the parental obligations of documenting childhood took on a specific urgency in the 1950s, the tasks necessary to make films were geared towards fathers. Gender roles inscribed yet again how films were made and who made them. The filmmaker is regularly addressed as 'he' and assumed to be the father of the family. Handbooks overwhelmingly show white men holding cameras and filming. Yet given the amateur camera was used primarily at home, showing women with cameras accentuated how easy they were to use and how they could fulfil their maternal duty of filming their children.

²² Ginette Bléry, *Le Super 8: Techniques, Conseils*. Paris: Solar, 1978, 25.

By and large the manuals geared their technical information to male readers with supporting roles addressed to women. For example, Kodak's *How to Make Good Movies* circa 1940 features photos of a young couple reading the handbook and commenting on it.

He: "*How to Make Good Movies*"—here's the book we want to read, all right."

She: "Our movies seem pretty grand to me just the way they are. Why bother about reading a book?" (2).

The discussion continues along a gendered pattern, her resistance meets each of his enthusiastic statements.

She: "If it's really easy to make better movies, I'm all for this book. But if it's going to take a lot of fussing..." (6).

[...]

She: "Filters! I'm afraid this is going to be so much Greek to me!" (40).

[...]

She: "M'm'm—you'd better read this. I'm afraid trick shots will be a bit over my head" (132).

This discourse relies heavily on her ambivalence to filmmaking. It is eventually overcome when she realizes how easy it is. She even volunteers to edit their home movies because she has "got more time for it" (175) than he does. In concluding she concedes that "making movies seemed a bit difficult too until we got started and learned how easy it is" (179). Women are thus positioned as potential, but resistant, home moviemakers.

If white women were presented and pictured as moviemakers less often than their male counterparts, than black filmmakers, male or female are almost completely absent from the ideal family as it is presented in the how-to manuals. The white, middle-class nuclear family is almost exclusively used as the model. Of the numerous help manuals I examined only Kodak's 1966 version of *How to Make Good Movies* represented a black middle class family. The photos showed a young girl playing a toy piano and father and son playing with a train set. Non-white families are almost all but absent from the idealized family as it appears in these manuals.

1.3 A Different Everyday

Despite the scarcity of non-white representations of families in help manuals, this absence cannot be seen to directly correspond with how home movie-making equipment was used. Although the typical family represented in how-to manuals was a middle-class white family, home movies did record a different everyday, one that was not whitewashed and 'classless'. As Karen Ishizuka of the Japanese American National Museum points out:

We have never seen images of the United States in the early part of the century *as lived by* Mexican Americans, African Americans, Japanese Americans

and other ethnic groups-except as recorded and documented in our own family albums and home movies. As such, early home movies provide not only the most legitimate portrayals and real reflections of ethnic American life, but the only motion picture documentation of ethnic life from the point of view of those who lived it.²³

Ishizuka supports her argument by pointing to the home movies produced inside the Japanese-American internment camps during WWII. Although the cameras were considered contraband some were secretly brought in and provide a rare glimpse into a specific moment in history. The everyday as experienced in the internment camps needless to say would significantly vary from the everyday of a white middle class suburban family.

From the 1940s through to the 1960s the use of home movie cameras were heavily prescribed by manuals that offered technical and creative help. The ideas for films put forth by these manuals prescribed a narrow range of possible subjects and subject matters. What emerged from these manuals was a set of norms and domestic rituals that created a mythic ideal of the everyday-one to aspire to. The idea of the 'normal everyday' inscribed gender roles as well as erasing sexual or racial difference. A rupture emerges, however, when home movie practices are put into

²³ Karen Ishizuka, *Artifacts of Culture. Journal of Film Preservation*. Volume XXV, No. 52, April 1996.

play by those excluded by the discourse of these manuals, such as the use of home movie cameras in Japanese internment camps. If the everyday is to exist as a culturally viable concept it must emerge in heterogeneous complexity.

Archivist Rick Prelinger has explained the need to collect home movies in the following way:

Home movies show daily life—regular people doing ordinary things. For me, they're the best record of how people and places used to look. As our collection gets larger, it has begun to form a 'time capsule' of life in the 20th century. We want to assemble as many families' films as possible so that people in future generations can see how Americans lived and how our country looked.²⁴

Although the call for representations of 'daily life' is once again asserted, the search for 'as many families films as possible' acknowledges the need of a wide range of filmic representations to underscore the diversity of daily life. Prelinger's project potentially shakes the predominant myth of the home movie as an idealized moment in an individual personal history. In the next chapter I turn to the conception of the home movie as an idealized version of the past and how this has been perpetuated

²⁴ This quote is taken from a flyer Prelinger handed out at a screening of films he presented in Toronto at a Pleasure Dome screening in 1995.

within the popular culture form of the commercial narrative film.

Two

Home Movie Memory

From Idealization to Trauma in Narrative Film

Given the growing interest in home movie making as a leisure time activity in the 1940s, '50s and '60s it is curious to note that fictional feature films of the same period irregularly incorporate amateur films as a narrative device. Although they are used in such films as *Rebecca* (Dir. Alfred Hitchcock, US, 1940) and *Peeping Tom* (Dir. Michael Powell, GB, 1960) it is not until the 1980s that commercial narrative films regularly begin to employ a set of conventions within their organization of narrative space and time that are easily recognized and read by audiences as the 'home movie'. This use of the home movie within narrative film points to the manner in which it has moved beyond the private sphere into a public practice employed by a mass cultural form. An analysis of the use of the home movie in narrative film underscores how we understand and 'read' home movies socially, culturally and artistically.

By the 1980s and 1990s, the small gauge home movie is considered an obsolete practice, one that is used

increasingly to conjure up nostalgia of ideal times past.¹ In this chapter I will examine the use of the home-movie-within-a-narrative-film and outline how it shifts from an idealized view of the past to a representation of melancholy, trauma and the repressed.² In particular, I will examine how the idealized discourse of family togetherness and happiness perpetuated by home movie making are engaged with by commercial film practice. Specifically, I will analyze how the shift from idealization to trauma is played out primarily as a crisis in masculinity. Using several films to illustrate the development and shift within this convention I will begin with modes of idealization in *Raging Bull* (Dir. Martin Scorsese, US, 1980) and *Paris, Texas* (Dir. Wim Wenders, US 1984), and proceed to an investigation of loss, mourning and melancholy in *Philadelphia* (Dir. Jonathan Demme, US, 1993) and trauma in *The Game* (Dir. David Fincher, US, 1997) and *Affliction* (Dir. Paul Schrader, US, 1998).

¹ Although my interest is in home movie use in narrative feature film, it also figures in advertisements.

² While I analyze films chronologically I do not mean to imply that one sets of conventions displaces another. Nor is this exploration exhaustive, there are numerous other commercial films using home movies that I do not discuss. For example, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (Dir. Ted Kotcheff, Can., 1974), *Man of Flowers* (Dir. Paul Cox, Aus., 1983), *The Myth of Fingerprints* (Dir. Bart Freundlich, US, 1997), *8mm* (Dir. Joel Schumacher, US, 1999) *For Love of the Game* (Dir. Sam Raimi, US, 1999).

While trying to articulate the home movie as indicative of a loss or lack that the male protagonist suffers, I will also turn to two films that consider what role the home movie may play for a female protagonist in *Home For the Holidays* (Dir. Jodie Foster, US, 1995) and *Hilary and Jackie* (Dir. Anand Tucker, GB, 1998).

2.1 Mimicking the Home Movie

If narrative cinema is able to mimic the look and feel of the home movie then it must be possible to decipher its aesthetic and cultural codes. Historically, the social functions of amateur filmmaking have prevailed over aesthetic concerns. As I argued in the previous chapter, the discourse of home movie making has been dominated by an emphasis on daily life and the filming of an idealized family. Content of home movies, is thus driven by a concern with the recording of everyday life and the prevailing assumption that home movies are necessarily, if not exclusively, a domestic practice. The lack of attention to production details has paved the way to the identifiable style of home movies, a style that is apparently not concerned with aesthetics (an anti-aesthetic aesthetic) and thus summed up as "amateurish". Aesthetically the home

movie is identifiable because of this amateurish look: shaky camera, grainy image, out of focus shots, excessive use of zoom or pan, absence of coherent narrative, etc.

As I argued in the previous chapter, the content of the home movie is concerned primarily with the recording of domestic everyday life. Home movies are very selective about what is filmed by underscoring what are not considered appropriate topics for filming: death, divorce, preparing meals, getting dressed, cleaning house, making love and having quarrels. "Obviously, what is supposed to be a documentation of daily family life, isn't at all. Rather than finding that anything can be filmed, we find a very selective choice of topics."³ The home movie becomes easily identifiable both in the scenes it selects to film (or not film) and in the style (or lack of) with which it is filmed.

If the home movie is used primarily as means to record an ideal family life, then this principle use continues to dominate and influence its reception both as a form in its own right and its appropriated use in narrative film. Writing in 1987 on the role of the home movie in commercial narrative film Patricia Erens concludes that the predominant use of home movies in commercial film is to

"indicate the past, most generally a happy, innocent past, a time of togetherness."⁴ Over a decade later Marie-Thérèse Journot writes that the home movie is a way "pour immortaliser un moment idéal, ou pour l'immortaliser comme moment idéal, qui va permettre de transformer le passé en âge d'or" (150). Although Journot has more examples to cite and is able to set forth a more complex typology of the use of the home movie in narrative film, it is the idealized form that is the predominant use. It is this idealized form, and how the home movie supports or deviates from it, that forms the basis of its function in narrative film. If the home movie is an idealized version of daily life, this idealization is attributable to the selectivity of what is filmed. A distillation transpires between appropriate and inappropriate material for the camera. What is considered unrepresentable are the images and stories that would unsettle the narrative of the content, nuclear family. This narrative of the happy family, particularly as it is articulated in post-war America via the home movie, operates on the suppression of whatever is aberrant to this fiction. Thus it is a mechanism that is at times oppressive and repressive to its participants, male and female alike.

³ Chalfen, 63.

⁴ Patricia Erens "Home Movies in Commercial Narrative Film" in *The Journal of Film and Video*, Volume 38, Number 3-4. Summer-Fall, 1986 99.

It is precisely the disjuncture between what the home movie represents and what it hides (represses) that is at the core of the crises for the protagonists in the films I will discuss.

The use of the home movie within narrative film derives much of its impact from it being aligned with truth. While narrative cinema is an insistent present, unfolding in real time in front of the audience, the home-movie provides the film with a past. Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (1981), contrasts the function of photography and cinema in that the photograph establishes a stronger sense of *having-been-there* than cinema. The home movie within a narrative fictional film attempts to function in a similar manner—it hopes to evoke a sense of *this was so*. Barthes claims that the photographic referent is irrefutable, the home movie within narrative fictional film makes a claim to this reality. The referent of the home movie is meant to function in the same manner as the referent of a photograph. Home movies are the filmic version of the photograph. The home movie relies on an intense indexicality of the *that has been*, it authenticates the existence of the beings. What is inherent to all films that use home movies within their narrative construction is

a reliance on the home movie being read as authentic and real.

The home movie's reception and conception as an idealized moment is assumed in its use in narrative feature films. When the home movie deviates from this expected mode of operation it is used to signal a disjuncture for the protagonist and thus for the audience. A disjuncture that is overwhelmingly coded as traumatic. This is established in one of the earliest uses of home movie footage in a narrative film—*Peeping Tom* (Dir. Michael Powell, GB. 1960). The main character, Mark Lewis (Carl Boehm), is murdering women while filming their deaths. The peeping Tom of the film's title is Mark who suffers from scopophilia, the uncontrollable desire to look. His voyeurism is the psychopathology at the root of the film's narrative. In addition, to contributing an exemplary example of the relation of the camera and woman's to-be-looked-at-ness, as outlined in Laura Mulvey's seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," (1975) *Peeping Tom* also establishes the home movie as a site of trauma. The reason for Mark's pathology is precisely the trauma he suffered as a young boy, a trauma that is intricately bound to the home movie. In *Peeping Tom*, Mark has befriended his neighbour Helen (Anna Massey). As their friendship moves toward romantic

entanglement, Helen asks to see Mark's film as a 21st birthday present. He agrees to show her what he has been working on. He initially picks up one film canister, presumably the film of his murders, hesitates and chooses another. The film starts out innocently enough with Helen commenting on the beauty of the little boy she sees sleeping. It is Mark. This film, it turns out, is the home movie made of Mark by his scientist father Dr. Lewis. "What a wonderful idea." Helen begins, "You'll be able to show your..." but she doesn't finish her sentence because she is distracted by the film as it shifts from a typical to aberrant home movie.

Mark is shown peeping on a kissing couple. Dr. Lewis filming this seemingly inappropriate material surprises Helen. This is followed by more inappropriate material, Mark saying goodbye to his dead mother, her funeral and burial (described by Mark but off screen) followed by a blonde woman frolicking on a beach in a bikini. His latter woman is Mark's step-mother, whom his father married only six weeks after his mother's death. The subsequent 'normal' scene of mother and son now can be read against its appearances as a typical home movie. The camera is passed to the step mother and of course immediately goes out of focus, now the blurry father and son are in the camera. Dr.

Lewis returns to the camera focuses it and then re-enters the frame to give his son a present—a new movie camera.

Peeping Tom operates on an understanding and reading of the home movies of Mark's youth as deviating from what a 'normal' home movie is and how a 'normal' little boy behaves. The non-typical events are traumatic in precisely how non-idealized they are. The nuclear family is shattered, the mother is dead and the father is abusive. The crises that the home movie in *Peeping Tom* puts forth are all, as Kaja Silverman aptly states, "key moments within the Oedipal narrative (the castration threat, the primal scene, the loss of the mother, and access to the paternal legacy, here represented by the gift of a camera)."⁵ Mark's home movie represents the traumatic loss of his mother and identification with his father in the Freudian tradition. Thus the home movie becomes a means of representing a real or imagined loss of an ideal for the male protagonist.

⁵ Kaja Silverman. *The Acoustic Mirror*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988) 33.

2.2 Home Movie as Idealized Past

The home movie as a representation of loss does not necessarily need to present the crisis in the home movie itself. On the contrary, the home movie can be an idealized past moment that is positioned in opposition to the main narrative. Thus in a film such as *Raging Bull* (Dir. Martin Scorsese, US, 1980) the home movie footage is a succession of happy events in the lives of the La Motta brothers. The home movie segment functions as a condensed narrative of the happier times in the two men's lives. We are shown Jake's (Robert De Niro) courtship with Vicky (Cathy Moriarty), their subsequent marriage and the footage of them with their children. We also see Joe's (Joe Pesci) marriage and children. Each of the segments is intercut with one of Jake's boxing matches. The home movies are in colour in contrast to the stark black and white of the main narrative. The happier, idealized time of the home movie contrasted with the brutal violence of his fights. The violence of Jake's professional life threatens to spill into the picture perfect frame of his private life.

The home movies in *Raging Bull* are films that are being made of and by Jake La Motta as an adult. He is immortalizing his own good times and making memories for

his children. The full impact of the home movie sequence emerges later in the film after Jake's marriage is over, his wife and children have left him, and his career failed. Jake was trying to make a perfect life for himself, one that he represented in home movies, but that he ultimately failed to achieve. The loss represented by the home movie, is the loss of happier, perfect times of an adult not of an idealized childhood.

In *Paris, Texas* (Dir. Wim Wenders, US, 1984) the home movie is also a representation of an idealized past for an adult male, as well as literal stand in for memory. Travis (Harry Dean Stanton) walks out of the desert after being away for four years. Travis is unwilling and unable to account for the missing years of his life. He has no memory. His brother Walt picks him up in Texas and drives him back to Los Angeles, where Travis is reunited with his son Hunter. Hunter who was only four when Travis disappeared has no recollection of his father. Hunter's mother (Nastasia Kinski) left shortly after Travis' disappearance and Hunter has no memory of her either. Both Hunter and Travis have no memory. The only record of their life together is a super 8 film that Walt shot of them all together. Like the home movie of *Raging Bull*, this is an idealized memory. Travis, Hunter and Mom ham it up for the

camera, kissing and hugging and playing with Hunter. They appear happy and in love. Watching the film becomes a means to recover memory for Travis and Hunter. Memory is a home movie.

In *Paris, Texas* there is no flood of memory, no recollection that overwhelms the viewer. Instead of the home movies bringing on memories, the home movie is the memory. Hunter's memory is the most obviously influenced by the movie, when asked if he recalls his mother, he responds, "Not really, only from that little movie we saw." When Travis decides to go out in search of his lost wife, the reasons are once more articulated by Hunter and again based on his impressions of the movie. "He loves her" Hunter announces, and when asked how he knows this responds "because of the way he looks at her [in the movie]." In *Paris, Texas* the idealizing function of the home movie is retained with the family frolicking on the beach of happier times but it also takes on the new function of standing in (literally) for the memory of Hunter and Travis. Again what is lost is the family and the memory of it but reconciliation is suggested as possible and desirable.

The desirability of the nuclear family seems to be thrown in question in a film such as *Philadelphia* (Dr. Jonathan Demme, 1993). Here the main protagonist is a gay

lawyer Andrew Bennett (Tom Hanks) afflicted with AIDS who launches a lawsuit against his former employer for wrongful dismissal. Journot reads the use of home movies in *Philadelphia* as a unique example of a tight knit family group opposing social injustice (150). Although this is one possible reading, it misses the manner in which the hetero-normative nuclear family is positioned at the centre of the films--both the primary narrative and the home movies/videos.

In *Philadelphia* the impending death of Andrew Bennett drives the narrative, and structures time. Touted as one of the first mainstream commercial films to deal with the AIDS crisis, *Philadelphia* manages to re-position the nuclear family at the centre of the drama. Mid-way through the film, Hanks comes home for a holiday and his lover videotapes his return. (All this is shown in black and white with a REC symbol flashing in the bottom corner to signal to the viewer that it is happening right now and is beginning recorded 'live'.) Andrew talks into the camera and takes the viewer on a tour of his childhood home. Outside, he bends over and brushes away snow to uncover his small handprints in the cement. A later video sequence shows Hanks dancing at the same family gathering. Neither of these images show him with his lover Miguel (Antonio

Banderas) who is either behind the camera or out of the frame. The homosexual couple is absent from the home movie/video.

The final scene of the film takes place at a memorial for the now dead Andrew. On a table is a television playing a tape of transferred home movies, the camera pans in until the entire screen is filled with the home movie of Andrew as a child. The scenes are typical, Andrew playing on a beach, having a picnic, etc. We see him with his siblings and mother (his father, we assume, is filming). The poignancy of the home movie relies on the conventionality of the images. The little boy in the film, is like a thousand little boys appearing in home movies across the country. Andrew's death is the death of this perfect little boy who comes from a 'normal' heterosexual family as it is presented to us in the home movie. Logically, *Philadelphia* insists on excluding the homosexual couple from the home movie frame: their presence is unrepresentable.

2.3 Home Movie as Trauma

By the late 1990s however, it is precisely the unrepresentable, the repressed of the home movie that is highlighted in such films as *The Game* (Dir. David Fincher,

US, 1997) and *Affliction* (Dir. Paul Schrader, US, 1998). In both of these films the protagonists at the centre of the (melo)drama have memories that are traumatic childhood events presented as a home movie. Like *Peeping Tom* the home movies are a means to explain the early childhood events of the characters but unlike *Peeping Tom*, they are not actual home movies but memory coded as a home movie.

The Game begins with a home movie montage. This sequence of shots introduces us to the characters we will encounter in the film. The 1950s home movie shows a birthday party and boys clowning around a pool. A shot of a father with first one and then two sons establishes the familial unit. The mother is absent, which may be explained by her being the cameraperson or simply left out of the frame, for this is a film predominately about masculinity. This film ends and we are transported to the diegetic present day where one of the sons is now a forty-eight year old man. Nicholas Van Orten (Michael Douglas) is an extremely successful but deeply bitter and unhappy investment banker. The cause of his troubles is revealed to us via flashbacks that mimic the home movie footage that commenced the film. This latter 'home-movie' is presented in the same manner that the film's opening sequence was—grainy image, shaky camera, saturated Kodachrome

colour. The event however is the suicide of Nicholas' father. He throws himself off the roof of their palatial family home. This home movie memory is a disturbing antidote to the 'perfect' images of the earlier home movies.

In *Affliction* (Dir. Paul Schrader, 1998), explores similar terrain. The 'home movie' in *Affliction* is also not a movie but a memory. The memory is indicated by the lack of apparent cameraperson as both parents and sons appear in the 'home movie'. It is filmed in the same anti-aesthetic of the home movie with shaky camera and grainy image but the content is abuse. *Affliction's* home movie is the antithesis of the idealized representation of the family and youth. Nick Nolte stars as Wade a middle-aged man who is deeply bitter and angry. His father, an abusive drunk (James Coburn), continues to exert a huge influence over his life. In what is one of the key scenes of the film, Wade overhears someone telling a story of his father's abusive nature, it is Wade's story. The memory comes back to him. In the middle of a winter storm, Wade and his younger brother are forced to stack wood that has been frozen into a mass. They hack at the woodpile with shovels and are taunted by their father, when Wade asks if they can

go back inside, his father's anger escalates and he hits him.

Another memory is presented later in the film when the drunken father makes a gesture as if to hit his wife, a young Wade attempts to intervene and is struck down. These "repressed" memories present themselves as the home movie that could never and was never made. In *Affliction*, Wade recounts this story to his younger brother Rolfe (Willem Dafoe) who is present at the incident, at least in the memory. Yet he cannot recall being there. No, he insists, he heard about it but he wasn't there. The home movie, like memory, can be faulty. It doesn't present all the facts. In films such as *The Game* and *Affliction* home movie codes and conventions are overturned and the repressed is presented.

In *Post-traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties* (1998), Kirby Farrell refers to the "vogue of childhood misery" and quotes from Nicholas Lemann's article of the same name. Kirby writes that "the recent preoccupation with abusive childhood's [Lehmann] sees as 'in part a revisionist history of the Baby Boom years, written by the former babies; it gets much of its oomph from the idea that the heavily propagandized family life of the 1950s was actually nightmarish'" (211). What is fascinating about *The Game* and *Affliction* is the manner in which they

expose the myth of a happy 1950s childhood by employing the codes of the home movie to relate a traumatic memory. If the blissful family of 1950s commodity culture was in fact nightmarish and the home movies of the era don't show it, then present-day home movie memories will.

The idealization of the home movie, or deviations from it, are the means to articulate a traumatic episode for the male protagonist. As we have seen in *Peeping Tom*, *The Game* and *Affliction*, the traumatic home movie is the result of paternal abuse or neglect. The dominance of this home-movie device in explaining damage to the male rather than female psyche and body is in part attributable to the ongoing fascination with masculinity in crisis (Michael Douglas has made a career out of it) compounded by the paucity of films with female protagonists. I will now turn to two films that feature female protagonists; *Hilary and Jackie* (Dir. Anand Tucker, GB, 1997) and *Home for the Holidays*, (Dr. Jodie Foster, US, 1995) and consider whether home movies function differently in these films.

2.4 A Girl's Own Home Movie

If the home movie is a means by which to signal a troubled relation to a portrait of a 'perfect' family for

male protagonists, is this signalling of incongruity gender specific? Up until this point, all examples have pointed to the manner in which masculinity is thrown into question by the conventions of the home movie. Yet are the fictions that inform the home movie equally nightmarish for female participants?

Based on a true story, *Hilary and Jackie* explores the relationship between two sisters, Hilary (Rachel Griffiths) and Jacqueline du Pré (Emily Watson). They grow up in a musical household and are each gifted musicians, but whereas Hilary opts for a 'normal' life with a husband and family, Jackie pursues international fame. Jackie marries a renowned pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim (James Frain), and they are treated like musical royalty on their numerous and incessant tours. This frantic pace wears Jackie down and she longs for the simpler life that Hilary has. On an unannounced visit, a depressed Jackie appears at Hilary's country home. While Hilary desperately tries to help her Jackie grows more and more despondent. When Jackie asks to sleep with Hilary's husband Kiffer (David Morrissey) as a way out of her depression, Hilary agrees. Hilary becomes increasingly more distraught as the relationship between her sister Jackie and her husband Kif blossoms.

The culminating moment of Hilary's distress over the relationship between her sister and her husband is relayed to the audience as a home movie. Jackie and Kif are out in the garden playing with Hilary and Kif's children. Hilary watches. Her point of view is as though is it a home movie, all the usual markers, grainy image, shaky camera, etc. The 'home movie' Hilary is witnessing is, for someone unfamiliar with the relations of the participants, ideal. A happy couple playing with children, horsing around, hamming it up for the camera. It is a joyous nuclear family. For Hilary and the knowing audience, however, the distress from this idealized image is in the knowledge that it is Hilary's family that is being presented. Her sister, Jackie, has usurped Hilary's position as the mother of this ideal family scenario. It is at this moment that Hilary realizes that she may be losing her husband to her sister, and she is devastated.

Like *Raging Bull* and *Paris, Texas*, Hilary and Jackie deals with adult characters. The film juxtaposes the reading of the home movie as ideal with a more troubled reading. The reading however is not the nostalgic moment of childhood but a traumatic discovery in adulthood. The moment that can be read as perfect has a more distressing reading which the audience is capable of inferring because

they have more knowledge about the participants than the home movie itself provides. A film such as *Hilary and Jackie* once again discloses that the home movie's ability to capture those seemingly perfect moments can be flawed. It is precisely what the image cannot and will not disclose that is foregrounded.

What the image can't say is at issue in the film *Home for the Holidays*. The main protagonist Claudia Larson (Holly Hunter) visits her family for Thanksgiving and the usual family dynamics ensue—bickering, resentment, unfulfilled expectations, etc. Towards the end of the film, Claudia descends into the basement where her father (Charles Durning) has set up a film projector and is watching old home movies. Claudia watches with him. "Bunch of clowns" says Claudia in response to the antics she and her siblings are performing on camera. "Clown family" her father answers to images of himself and his wife. After the film ends, Henry tells Claudia that he thinks his life has been a disappointment because he always settled for less. This is illustrated by his home movies, which did not in fact capture the best times of the Larson family. He describes taking his family down to the airport to watch a plane take-off from the tarmac. "You were fearless" he states, "1969, 10 seconds tops. I wish I had it all on

tape." The truly great moments of life, Henry suggests, are not captured on film.

Claudia and her father Henry are both adults reflecting back on their lives. The home movies are neither traumatic nor perfect. In fact they failed to capture the perfect moments. This is reinforced with the final sequence of *Home for the Holidays* which is again shot as a home movie but in keeping with the lesson of the film it is a home movie of all the great moments that weren't filmed. There is the movie of the Larson family on the airport tarmac and Claudia's gay brother Tommy (Robert Downey Jr.) on a beach with his lover. Perfect moments that have not been captured on film. What the home movie fails to capture need not only be traumatic it can also fail to capture the perfect moments. Indeed, the perfect moments may still exist in the future, waiting to be seized.

The critique of the family and the home movie in these narrative feature films is neither unique nor unparalleled. As I will examine in my final chapter, non-commercial filmmakers working in documentary or experimental modes have appropriated both the home movie and home movie making equipment for their own purposes. I will now turn to the critique of the home movie and what possibilities lie beyond it.

Three

From Home Movie to Home Made

If narrative fictional films of the late 1990s had begun to interrogate the idealized view of the home movie, this inquiry has numerous precedents. For by the late 1960s artists and activists had begun to deconstruct the home movie. The heavily prescribed practices associated with small gauge filmmaking were being challenged by new political and artistic possibilities. In this chapter I will examine the home movie post-1965, paying particular attention to the introduction of the super 8 film and camera system, and discourses that attempt to liberate small gauge filmmaking from the home movie.

The oppressiveness of the home movie is intricately linked to its domesticity, a private practice centred in the home. Patricia Zimmermann points out that "by the late fifties, the domestication of amateur filmmaking as a leisure-time commodity erased any of its political or economic possibilities" (113), unfortunately this reading forecloses on the potential of amateur filmmaking for anything other than recording domestic rituals. If amateur film is to be liberated, it necessitates taking the home out of the home movie. The conflation of amateur or narrow

gauge filmmaking and the home movie needs to be rigorously challenged.

Re-contextualizing the possibilities for amateur filmmaking necessitates an interrogation of the home movie. I have argued in chapter two that the home movie as an ideal or perfect memory is being critiqued in some narrative feature films. Yet the arguments for a deconstruction of the home movie take on particular salience when articulated through an understanding of the ideological underpinnings of these illusory home movie images. Particularly how these images are read not by heterosexual men but by lesbians, gays and feminists. Lesbian filmmaker and theorist Michelle Citron points out that

the ubiquity of these home images, each resembling another, makes what they record seem natural. By providing the "good" memory, home movies show us an ideal image of the family with everyone in his or her proper place: parents in charge, men in control, families together.¹

In one of her films *Daughter Rite* (1978) Citron uses her own family home movies and provides a counter-reading to the one most readily available. By weaving in her family's narrative into the home movies, she discloses what has

¹ Michelle Citron, *Home Movie and Other Necessary Fictions* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis & London, 1999) 13-15.

hitherto been unavailable to the audience. By re-articulating some of the gestures in the film, their controlling and oppressive element, as Citron experienced it, is brought into focus. Through this process of remaking her family home movies, Citron claims to have "appropriated the medium that was complicit in preserving the idyllic vision of the family" (22).

This form of appropriating the home movie is also evident in some art-house cinema practice. For example Derek Jarman uses home movie footage from his youth in *Last of England* (1987), as well as using home movies and super 8 film he shot of his garden, in *The Garden* (1990). Again Jarman's homosexuality informs his use of the home movie, and the manner in which his films undercut idyllic readings of them.

Home movie technology does not need to be used in the manner that is the dominant custom. The complicity of the medium with practice does not have a direct correlation. Indeed the one to one equation between a medium and its practice cannot ever be so neatly delineated. In her discussion of the effects of Do-It-Yourself manuals and books of the 1950s, Zimmermann asks

just how much the discourse of advice columns and camera manufacturers over determined the actual practices of amateur filmmakers. It would be

theoretically foolish to presume a one-to-one correspondence between discourse and practice (Zimmermann: 1995 xiii).

Although the practice of home movie making as outlined in help manuals did dominate what was produced it did not foreclose on divergent uses of amateur filmmaking technology.

If amateur filmmaking equipment is to be used in new ways it must be wrenched from its negative history. The ideological weight and repressive function of home movies must be combated. For gays and lesbians, like Citron, the materials for home movie making need to be appropriated for alternate uses. The home needs to be taken out of the home movie. Experimental filmmaker Matthias Mueller suggests that using a format such as super 8 was ideologically loaded.

It was an old, home-movie, amateur gauge for fathers whose reactionary films all looked alike in a permanent repetition of themes: family, holidays, Christmas. We had to free Super-8 from the cliché that it could only be used for individual memory. We always tried to present it as a medium that could be used for art.²

Mueller's own openly gay themed work stands in contrast to all the home movies that reinforced the dominance of the nuclear family. The 'reactionary' uses of super-8 and other

² Matthias Mueller, "Old Children and AIDS: An Interview with Matthias Mueller" in *The Independent Eye*. Vol. 11 #2/3 Spring 1980.

home movie formats can be appropriated for an anti-home movie cinema. This counter-cinema operates both in terms of re-contextualizing home movies as well as using the tools of amateur filmmaking for different practices.

Citron and Mueller suggest two ways to tackle the legacy of the home movie; one is to re-contextulize home movie footage, the other is to appropriate the means of production. This call would be taken up in 1980s by "a new generation of daughters [that] would begin making movies with Dad's camera."³ These daughters (and sons) would make home movies unlike the ones their parents fashioned. For example, filmmaker Marnie Parrell has used her father's camera to make anti-home movie movies. In "Repression or How to Make Good Home Movies" she writes:

I want to see the home movies that were never made. I want to watch all the family moments that never made it to Kodachrome regular 8. I think Kodak would agree that its rich saturated colour would beautifully preserve the deep greens and blues of a swollen bruise, or capture the festive mood of glistening red blood against the virgin white of small teeth. With a little planning, the manipulation and brutality of familial rape, incest, and neglect could be cleverly composed into narratives - the rich nauseous memories guaranteed to never fade...⁴

³ Janine Marchessault. "Reviews" *Screen* 37:4 Winter 1996, 422.

⁴ Marnie Parrell, "Repression of How to Make Good Home Movies" in *CineAction* No. 30 Winter 1992, 22.

These critiques of the home movie and the desire to appropriate these amateur modes of production did not emerge in a social and political vacuum. Calls for the appropriation of small gauge filmmaking tools for political and artistic aims has also been articulated as a means to combat dominant mainstream media. A growing interest in the democratization of media and the potential for participatory image-making, influenced by Marxist theories of technology, art and mass culture emerged in the mid-1960s.

The introduction of the super 8 film gauge and camera system in 1965 coincided with the growing interest in the emancipatory potential of new communication technologies. Super 8's accessibility and user friendliness meshed well with the call for media making to be in the "hands of the people". This interest dates back to thinkers such as Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht with threads leading through to the more contemporary theories of Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Raymond Williams. It was hoped that emerging media would usher in new states of consciousness, community as well as new artistic and political structures. In contrast to the expanding and ideologically suspect 'culture industry', as envisioned by Adorno and Horkheimer

(1944), (see chapter one) emanated a desire to create a radicalized media practice.

Amongst the sites of expanded participation were radio, film, community television and video. Video's portability, accessibility and ease of use have been proclaimed by media theorists and historians as *the* medium with radical potential. Yet, super 8 shared many of the same characteristics as video-portability and user-friendliness and precedes video as a mass marketed consumer good by twenty years. While Super 8 film technology was the latest amateur filmmaking equipment to hit the market in the late sixties, it did not preclude the use of older forms of amateur filmmaking, such as regular 8mm for non-home movie uses. I will however focus on super 8 because its introduction merged well with a discourse that challenged and contested dominant modes of media production as well as claims to an expanded the field of film practice(s) and practitioners.

In 1965, when super 8 was introduced to the public, the discourse regarded amateur film production was contradictory at best. On the one hand, super 8, and other home movie technologies, could be reduced to a leisure-time activity utilized to replicate bourgeois familial values. On the other hand, they offered a possibility of resistant

media practices. Although it is tempting to declare super 8's technical innovations as revolutionary I must place such announcements within the history of claims made about the possibilities of film technology - past and present, utopian and dystopian.

3.1 Super 8 and Technological Determinism

It is tempting to speak about technology and revolution in the same breath, but there is a danger in doing so. Can the introduction of super 8 be simply referred to as revolutionary? From the beginning of cinema until super 8's arrival in 1965 numerous small gauge, non-professional (i.e. non-35mm) film formats had been introduced. Super 8 was the last effort by Kodak to revitalize the stagnant amateur film market. Super 8 was differentiated from previous film systems by its larger image size, easy to load cartridges and point-and-shoot cameras. It was significantly different from its predecessors in the small gauge film market with the novel introduction of the cartridge. A predecessor to the VHS videotape, the super 8 cartridge obviated the need for any technological savvy. Claims, however, to super 8 being "revolutionary" cannot be accepted uncritically. Market

driven claims to the "revolutionary"⁵ based on technical innovation cannot be equated with the radical political uses of technology. Jonathan Gershuny articulates this position as follows:

We can recognize revolutionary scientific ideas, technological advances, as they emerge, simply because they are new and different; technological advances with revolutionary consequences, by contrast, are very much more difficult to identify at the time that they first emerge—their consequences have not happened yet!⁶

Taking what Gershuny says into consideration, it is possible to view super 8 as an innovation at the time of its introduction, its larger political consequences however, revolutionary or not, can only be accessed by situating super 8 historically.

Media history is primarily driven by a technologically determinist view. An idea that progress and history are produced by technologies, seen or unseen, which effectively make man and modern society. In *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1975), Raymond Williams describes technological determinism as an immensely powerful and now

⁵ Kodak, *Professional Motion Imaging: Super 8mm Film History* (www.kodak.com/US/en/motion/super8/history.shtml) 2. Although in the present day Kodak refers to the introduction of super 8 as revolutionary I have not found any references to its introduction being revolutionary in any advertisements from the 1960s or early 1970s.

⁶ Jonathan Gershuny. "Postscript: Revolutionary Technologies and Technological Revolutions" in *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*. Ed. Roger Silverstone and Eric Hirsch. (London & New York: Routledge, 1992) 228.

largely orthodox view of the nature of social change. New technologies are discovered, by an essentially internal process of research and development, which then sets the conditions for social change and progress.

Williams delineates what he sees as a hard and soft view of technological determinism. In the hard version, described above, the new technologies are developed in an independent sphere and they in turn create new societies and social conditions. A hard technological determinist position makes an equation between technology and effect. The softer view, or what Williams calls the symptomatic version, sees a particular technology as a by-product of a social processes. These two views dominate thinking about technology and both depend on the isolation of technology. Ultimately, argues Williams, this leads to a dead end. As an alternative, he suggests a re-integration of intention into the equation where "the technology would be seen, that is to say, as being looked for and developed with certain purposes and practices in mind" (8). This approach would take into consideration social needs. Although Williams's approach is laudable for its idealism it is difficult to envision such thoughtful deliberation in an era of late capitalism and corporate globalization. Yet his analysis does point to the need to move away from viewing technology

in and of itself towards an examination of it within the historical and social forces at work.

If the idea of developing new communication technologies with certain purposes in mind seems hopelessly utopian then perhaps we can benefit from a rethinking of how those technologies are used. In her examination of electric media and communication, *When Old Technologies Were New*, (1988) Carolyn Marvin attempts to write a history of electronic communication taking practice, not technology, as her focus. Marvin, in agreement with Williams, articulates how the dominant means of recounting media history concentrates on the object.

Artifactual approaches foster the belief that social processes connected to media logically and historically begin with the instrument, then new media are presumed to fashion new social groups called audiences from voiceless collectivities and to inspire new uses based on novel technological properties. When audiences become organized around these uses, the history of a new medium begins (5).

But Marvin proposes an alternative approach that moves away from the technology to how the technology is used - to the practices that it engenders. She focuses on how emergent media forms confirm, contest and re-articulate the field of social forces in which they arise.

Here, the focus of communication is shifted from the instrument to the drama in which existing groups perpetually negotiate power, authority,

representation, and knowledge with whatever resources are available...New practices do not so much flow directly from technologies that inspire them as they are improvised out of old practices that no longer work in new settings (5).

What Marvin articulates is the need to move away from a writing of media history that would focus on the artefact, the object, and look to the way it is used. Given this new focus on practices as opposed to objects, it is possible to rethink the history of small gauge filmmaking and the role of super 8. While using the apparatus as an organizing principle it is possible to turn away from a viewing of super 8 as a leisure-time home movie format towards an engagement in the multiplicity of filmmaking practices and its numerous discourses.

Theories of the media that attempt to assess the social uses of film technology and the political applications of communications technologies in general have been contradictory at best. Attitudes toward the revolutionary possibilities of media (for my purposes I will pay specific attention to film) can be seen as falling into two principle categories: the optimistic and the pessimistic. These positions don't conform to a comfortable chronology of an earlier utopian moment that then shifts to a more pessimistic view as historical conditions change. Side by side the optimistic and the pessimistic have co-

existed. The utopian with the apocalyptic. The hopeful with the cynical.

3.2 Theories of the Utopian

The social and political movements of the 1960s in Europe and North America were encouraged by claims of the radical potential of new communications technology. Influenced by the writings of Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer and Brecht - Hans Magnus Enzensberger in his influential essay "Constituents of a Theory of the Media" (1972) argues that media practice takes on radical potential within a social setting. The ability of the public to express itself is a basic right and access to media is proposed as means to a more democratic public life. Enzensberger argued that neither technology nor the individual was solely responsible for political change.

Work on the media is possible for an individual only insofar as it remains socially and therefore aesthetically irrelevant...It has long been clear from apparatus like miniature and 8mm movie cameras, as well as the tape recorder, which are in actual fact already in the hands of the masses, that the individual, so long as he remains isolated, can become with their help at best an amateur but not a producer.⁷

⁷ Hans Magnus Enzensberger "Constituents for a Theory of the Media" *Video Culture*. Edited by John Hanhardt (New York: Peregrine Smith Books, 1986) 106.

Enzensberger proposes a radical use of communications technology that can take on revolutionary potential depending on the context within which they are used. A shift in focus from the technological object to productive practices signals a move from a focus on production and a reworking of consumption.

Writing in the early 1970s Enzensberger suggests that the moment for such a Marxist theory is now possible precisely because of new developments in media. Perhaps for the first time in history, the control over the means of production is available to a critical mass. He lists news satellites, colour television, cable relay television, cassettes, videotape, videotape recorders, time-sharing computers and data banks amongst the new forms of media that are connecting with older forms such as radio, film, printing and the telephone to form new modes of production. "For the first time in history, the media are making possible mass participation in a social and socialized productive process, the practical means of which are in the hands of the masses themselves."⁸ Super 8 was the newest incarnation of an older mode of media production—film. Enzensberger thus reinvests the home movie camera with

⁸ Enzensberger 98.

potential use value that had been stripped of it in its commodity form.

In his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) Walter Benjamin clearly places himself in the camp of the optimists. Benjamin argues that a medium, and he is writing specifically about film, can effect perceptual changes. At the historical moment that he is writing, in the late 1930's, Benjamin sees the rise of moving sound pictures, offering an opportunity for significant social change. More precisely, Benjamin argues for a theory of art that would be useless for fascist purposes.

Film as a medium is capable of the "promotion of a revolutionary criticism of traditional concepts of art."⁹ Although film as a practice holds the seeds of revolutionary change, film is not being used as such. Film, through its ability to alter sense perception, can bring about social transformation. Benjamin sees the film as a transformation from the sequential, uniform and continuous to a moment of simultaneity. The film is ripe as an object, unlike painting or photography, for a "simultaneous collective experience" (234). Benjamin believes that film

⁹ Walter Benjamin, (1936) "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 231.

completely hides its mechanism of production, and this will entail a myriad of transformations, including the perception of the audience.

More importantly, the change in perception will also lead to a change in participation. "The greatly increased mass of participation has produced a change in the mode of participation" (239). Film is, for Benjamin, a revolutionary force. It is by changing the mode of perception and consequently increasing mass participation that will defeat fascism. For "fascism...expects war to supply the artistic gratification of a sense perception that has been changed by technology" (241). Benjamin contended that film provides an opportunity for one to become a film subject, moving from the position of passive spectator to active participant. He likens this development in film to the written tradition. He argues that printing and the press has provided mass access to publication and therefore "the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character...At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer...All this can easily be applied to the film" (232). The rigid distinction between consumer and producer begins to get blurred.

Benjamin's essay was translated into English for the first time in the late 1960s and his belief in the

transformative power of film, the blurring of the distinction between producer and consumer had a particular resonance for readers looking for new models of media participation. Benjamin's assertions of the reproducible nature of mass culture has a two-pronged effect, it offered a theory to empower those seeking the possibility of making their own media work, as well as providing a basis from which people could actively make their own cultural meanings. Benjamin offered something for those seeking to re-work the notion of production and consumption. He envisioned film creation that could engage the masses in the actual process of production, as well as re-formulating consumption as another form of production. The influence of this two streams of thought are evident in the writings of the 1970's; one, those searching for ways to empower the audience through making cultural meaning – demonstrated by the work in British Cultural Studies¹⁰ and two, a new generation of media theorists looking for a way of putting media in the hands of the people (Enzensberger).

¹⁰ See John Fiske, *Reading Television* (1978); Dick Hebdige, *Subcultures of Style* (1979) and Simon Frith, *Sociology of Rock* (1978).

3.3 Theories of the Dystopian

While Benjamin's writing provides an opportunity to revision artistic production and consumption, less hopeful theories were being put forth by a different school of media theoreticians. In contrast to Benjamin's optimism for film's potential, The Frankfurt School exhibited a pessimism towards popular culture and film. Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of the "culture industry" determined that the American film and television industry is profoundly negative. Film and television has no potential to advance left oriented politics. In their conceptualization, consumers of culture are merely cultural dopes who are effectively manipulated. The "culture industry" ensured that popular art was merely a means of consumption that could not be challenged or resisted. Any attempts of the audience to stand outside of the ideological function of mass culture and communications is futile.

Enthusiasm for the possibilities of film is predicated on the means of media production being in the hands of the people and the possibility of inverting or destroying the consumption/production binary. Enzensberger's call for new media practices believed that they would turn the

previously dominated class of consumer and receivers into producers and transmitters.

But not all Marxist influenced media theoreticians have the same belief in the emancipatory potential of media. In his "Requiem for the Media" (1986) Jean Baudrillard pointedly takes issue with Enzensberger and his idea that media in the hands of the masses will have emancipatory effects. Baudrillard writes:

As if owning a TV set or a camera inaugurated a new possibility of relationship and exchange. Strictly speaking, such cases are no more significant than the possession of a refrigerator or a toaster. There is no response to a functional object: its function is already there, an integrated speech to which it has already responded leaving no room for play, or reciprocal *putting in play*. (130)

Baudrillard's position can again be linked back to one of technological determinism where the object determines its uses. Like Adorno and Horkheimer, there is no possibility of production only consumption that is predetermined. Not only is the refiguring of communication as production impossible, communication itself is no longer possible. In Baudrillard's system there is no possibility of a redemptive notion of use value.

This latter assertion becomes evident in Baudrillard's essay "The Ecstasy of Communication" (1987), consciousness and technology have meshed in the "smooth operational

surface of communication" (127). The public and private spheres no longer exist, there is no opposition between subject and object, nor production and consumption. Whereas the call for accessible media, such as super 8, to be in the hands of the people was about empowering the masses, Baudrillard's contention that a camera has as much potential in transforming the powers of relations as a refrigerator or a toaster indicated how bankrupt he believed the possibility for transforming the use of media was.

3.4 The Small Gauge Revolution

Yet it is precisely to the domestic sphere that the small amateur film camera was traditionally confined. This confinement however was not necessarily a detriment but could be put to a new use. Super 8 cameras could be used to make the private public and to turn consumers into producers. The camera's position as a consumer good in the hands of the masses was seen as positive attribute that held the potential to be transformed and transforming. Feminism in particular, articulated, as the now famous maxim states, that "the personal is political", could benefit from this bringing of the inside out. Women's

issues that were predominately seen as private, domestic and inconsequential were being made public. Similarly gays and lesbians were "going public" with their sexual identities. The sphere of the everyday, was critical for a re-figuring of the relations of power.

The interchangeability of producer and consumer is not a new idea to emerge in the 1960s but rather has a lengthy historical precedent. For example Bertolt Brecht's "Radio as a Means of Communication: A Talk on the Function of Radio" (1947) makes a similar argument about radio's capability. He proposes that

radio should be converted from a distribution system to a communication system. Radio could be the most wonderful public communication system imaginable, a gigantic system of channels - could be, that is, if it were capable not only of transmitting but of receiving, of making the listener not only hear but also speak, not of isolating him but of connecting him.¹¹

This is reminiscent of Benjamin's claim about the possibility of mass participation in filmmaking, a radical re-thinking of the mode of production. These ideas struck a cord in the 1960s amongst media activists and theorists. Similar pronouncements were made.

¹¹ Bertolt Brecht, "The Radio as a Means of Communication: A Talk on the Function of Radio" trans. Stuart Hood. *Screen* 20: 3/4. Winter 1979-80.

Unlike the how-to manuals of the 1950s, filmmaking guidebooks of the 1960s and 1970s were just as likely to position filmmaking as a revolutionary tool as suggest ideal scenarios for filming the family. The popularization and democratization of the film form were advocated. The inner cover to Edward Pincus, *Guide to Filmmaking* (1969) encourages its reader to "Join the Filmmaking Revolution." Its euphoric introduction reads:

Some talk about the advent of super 8mm film as being comparable to the paperback revolution in book publishing. The hope is held out that someday it will be technically as easy to make a film as it is today to write. Then, perhaps, filmmaking will be free from an industry that fetters the filmmaker. Someday, to paraphrase Brecht, what there is shall go to those who are good for it. Thus, film to the filmmakers that they may change the world. (xii)

Equally exuberant is the introduction to the *Filmmaker's Guide to Super-8* (1980), which assures its readers that

you don't need a cigar to be a producer or a beret to be a director. You don't even need sunglasses to be a star. In a world of Super-8 filmmaking, you can be all these things - all by yourself - and throw in scriptwriter, cameraperson, editor, make-up artist, production designer and grip (2).

The discourses of Super 8 filmmaking manuals often positioned the filmmaker as a revolutionary simply because of access to the tools of production. Super 8 discourses incorporated the theories of Marxist theorists and

popularized them, particularly in "how-to" manuals. One of the more interesting 'how-to' manuals is Jonathan F. Gunter's *Super 8: The Modest Medium* (1976) published by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations) on communication technology and utilization. The introduction is critical of corporate control of media industries. Gunter suggests Super 8 – the modest medium as a communications tool to be used by industrial and non-industrial countries alike as an economical way for communities to make self-representative work. A critical approach to the technology is proposed that positions the needs and questions of the community of users before the answers the technology offers. Gunter is suspicious of a technological determinism that proclaims technology as a salvation, he warns that "unless one's natural enthusiasm for a new tool is restrained, one is likely to take a new-found solution in hand and go out in search of a problem" (13).

The educational and political potential of small format film, such as super 8, begins to be emphasized over its leisure use. This shift towards activism and education is evident in viewing small gauge film as an educational tool for children. As I pointed out in chapter one, mid-century leisure uses of amateur film positioned children as

ideal subjects in front of the camera but not as filmmakers themselves. However, by the late 1960s and early 1970s filmmaking is increasingly positioned as an activity for children and youth. Filmmaking practices for children are characterized by two dominant, although not mutually exclusive, discourses; one, focuses on artistic expression, the other on critiques of the 'culture industry' which propose media literacy via production. These two strains of thought are interwoven in the introduction to *Children as Film Makers* (1970):

This book is based on the premise that the film is a varied and open-ended experience for children. It proposes that a filmmaking program can be a natural channel for the child's self-expression as well as an effective way to orient him to the visual age in which we live. (7)

Whereas earlier children were the 'natural' subjects of the camera, now they are 'natural' filmmakers. In addition to exploring these innate creative abilities, making films functions as a means to acquire visual literacy.

The discourse of children's media production and literacy evolves in tandem with the call for blurring of the production/consumption distinction in media. As the introduction to *Film Making in Schools* (1968) points out, the primary motive in producing the book was

to inculcate among students an analytical, critical, discerning attitude about films

themselves. By learning to make a film, the student inevitably develops a knowledge of film methods and film values. His attitude as a viewer changes from that of passive spectator, to active adjudicator. (10)

Increasingly, a critique of film is considered inherent in the making of small gauge films. Using non-mainstream tools of production becomes synonymous with the critique of dominant media practices.

3.5 Technological Determinism Revisited

In the same manner that amateur filmmaking of the 1940s, '50s and early '60s is continually reduced to the 'home movie', the discourse emerging in the late 1960s habitually positions amateur filmmaking as a radicalized practice. The equation of the small gauge film and its radical political uses threatens to slip back into a technological determinism. The small flawed, low-tech super 8 film is positioned as the anti-thesis of dominant and oppressive media practices. For example Julio Garcia Espinosa, responded to the condition of filmmaking in Latin American countries, called "For An Imperfect Cinema" (1969) and essay in which he argued that filmmaking must be expanded beyond the privileged few. Like Brecht and Benjamin before him, Espinosa argues that spectators must

be transformed into active agents and authors. He equates a perfect cinema with one that imposes elitist concepts and practices. For Espinosa, artistic quality shifts from a definition within which everyone shares the taste of an elite to one where everyone participates in making culture. Filmmaking in the form of an imperfect cinema is proposed as a democratic art. As Espinosa describes it:

Imperfect cinema is no longer interested in quality or technique. It can be created equally well with a Mitchell or with an 8mm camera, in a studio or in a guerrilla camp in the middle of the jungle. Imperfect cinema is no longer interested in predetermined taste, and much less in "good taste" (82).

Espinosa's argument for a folk art was made in the particular historical context of Latin American political struggles for independence from colonialism. What an imperfect cinema is interested in is a revolutionary refashioning of film practice, a folk art in the hands of the masses—art would be everywhere.

Small filmmaking technology, first regular 8mm and then super 8, is heralded as a saviour — a salvation for artistic and political struggles alike. As Jonas Mekas writes in a short piece called "8mm as Folk Art" (1963)

You know what? It is the 8mm movie that will save us. It is coming. You may think I am crazy. But I know people, very talented people shooting their movies on 8mm. The day is close when the 8mm. home-movie footage will be collected and

appreciated as beautiful folk art, like songs and lyric poetry that was created by the people. Blind as we are, it will take us a few more years to see it, but some people see it already (83).

Regular 8mm will redeem art production and bring about the recognition of folk art. This 'revolution' is one profoundly different from the one envisioned by Espinosa. Mekas' imperfect cinema is envisioned as political because it is an art of the everyday.

The political nature of small gauge film is regularly assumed and implied because of the medium's size. Small is equated with radicalized use. The marginal status of the small gauge film positions itself in distinction to the mainstream. This becomes particularly evident in George Kuchar's manifesto *8mm: Avant-Garde of the Future?* (1964).

Yes, 8mm. is a tool of defence in this society of mechanized corruption because through 8mm. and its puny size we come closer to the dimensions of the atom.

We in this modern world of geological dormanticity [sic] are now experiencing an evolution evolving around minutenocities [sic]. We no longer think big except in the realm of nuclear bombardment, and therefore it is not unusual to find human beings with little things...

That 8mm. will become the avant-garde is a contagious disease-breeder because we are all avant-garde to the point of annihilation, and only when we face the after-effects of total deformity can we then think more clearly and cry because we couldn't concentrate in moral isolation.

Small gauge film is employed in a critique of Western institutions of art. The portability and accessibility of super 8 is seen as a means to expand the base of potential users beyond the confines of high art production. It offers artists the possibility to respond to what was perceived as the growing threat of mass media. Super-8 proposed a utopian critique that suggested the transformation of every aspect of the art system from production to reception with the producer and audience being interchangeable.

This discourse of radicalness continues through the 1980's and into the pre-set day. The small film is radical without being political simply because of its size. J. Hoberman articulates this position as follows:

There is surely no consensus among narrow gauge film-makers but, no matter how disparate their work or contradictory its ambitions, every one of their home-made productions serves to criticise and oppose the prodigal values of the culture industry. Against this oligarchy, linguini-thin super-8 presents itself as an egalitarian, utopian alternative. Although rarely put to overt political use, narrow gauge film-making is an inherently radical practice (1981: 1)

Hoberman re-articulates the easy slip from the technical to the radical. Technological determinism re-emerges with a vengeance.

Super 8's political stakes are continually derived from its miniature size but by the mid-1980's its radical

nature is reinforced by its marginal status. Super 8 is both small and obscure, assumed to be an obsolete technology--dead media. Yet, the further Super 8 gets pushed to the edge the more urgent its claims as an underground, radical and political tool. These discourses now circulate more easily than ever before via the Internet, film festivals and zines.

However, a one to one correspondence between discourse and practice is flawed at best. If amateur filmmaking is not synonymous with the home movie neither can super 8 be equated with a radicalized practice. Indeed, the myriad of applications of super 8 filmmaking practices underscore the manner in which it can be utilized in wildly divergent ways, not the least of which are commercially motivated. It may be the irony of super 8's existence that what keeps it from the brink of extinction are commercial applications. Music videos as well as use in commercial films (Oliver Stone for example often uses super 8 in his films) may be what's keeping super 8 film stock in production. As well, super 8 can be seen not a means of critiquing the mainstream but entering it. Indeed, for the independent feature film director, it is has almost become a rite of passage, a narrative of perseverance and precociousness, to

have made super 8 films as a teenager.¹² Or as Jeffrey Quarles points out in "Super 8: The New Medium of Choice" (1993) exploitation filmmakers have turned to super 8 as a cheap alternative to continue working in film.

¹² The increase in the number of younger, predominately male, film directors who reference their Super 8 filmmaking youth is evidence, I believe, of the 'hip' factor associated with Super 8.

Conclusion: Super 8 of the Future

The discourse of 'revolution' continues to circulate around super 8. The Kodak site claims super 8's introduction as a technological revolution, making it plausible for Kodak's Website to offer links to "Three Delicious Guides to Grassroots Filmmaking" and the "Essential Media Counterculture Catalog." The assertion of radicalness is so inculcated in super 8 discourse that its revolutionary nature is presumed. Form not content has prevailed.

If by the late 1950s the domestication of amateur film erased any of its political uses, then by the late 1990's the situation had reversed, where all super 8 practices are determined as political. Again, the uses of small gauge film are dominated by a single discourse, this time conflating technology and practice under the banner of the revolutionary. This is not to suggest that no politically motivated films get made on super 8. On the contrary many do, but not all super 8 films are revolutionary in and of themselves. Yet the potential for expanded practices, political ones included, still exists for super 8. As Patricia Zimmermann writes,

New uses for amateur cameras could be reinvented. They could retaliate against the enervation of the mass media and intervene into its

reproduction of aesthetic norms and unexamined familial ideologies. After all, technology itself does not impel political change; social relations determine its uses, deploy its technology, and strategize its boundaries.¹³

New generations of users may find new possibilities for this medium. The hope is there. As one Website reads:

The tools are here. The technology is here. The Time is NOW to take up your cameras and show us the possibilities we have not seen and maybe haven't even imagined. We are here for so short a time. Hide the lessons and the inspirations in the moving shadows you create. Show us the way. Remember the Past Mistakes and show us how to avoid them in our future.¹⁴

Super 8 can be used for filming babies or for making activist films, how it will be used in the future is in the hands of those with the camera.

¹³ Zimmermann, 152.

¹⁴ Christian Mercker "Rants!" gUerRillA ArTs Website
(<http://mindspring.com/~cricken/rant1.html>)

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