

More Than Meets the Home: Mapping Home Movie Migrations in Recent Preservation and  
Programming Initiatives

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## ABSTRACT

### More Than Meets the Home: Mapping Home Movie Migrations in Recent Preservation and Programming Initiatives

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In the popular imaginary, small gauge format home movies have been understood as small, dormant objects whose function and relevance remain fixed to domestic settings and rituals of family reminiscing. However, in the last few decades, scholars, and theorists from a variety of disciplines have introduced new strategies and methodologies of approaching the home movie and have positioned the home movie as a complex archival text that offers rich historical and cultural insights. We can observe these methodologies and practices at work in the various archival institutions and cultural formations which have emerged in response to these new and evolving engagements with home movies. Through a close analysis of the applied methodologies and practices embodied in the working models of two specific home movie preservation initiatives, Home Movie Day (HMD) and Chicago's South Side Home Movie Project (SSHMP), this thesis aims to identify and demonstrate how, and to what capacity, home movies are transformed and reanimated within these new archival frameworks.

The first chapter maps the interdisciplinary methodologies and archival interventions for approaching home movies that have been emulated through the global HMD model. The second chapter responds to the shortcomings of the HMD model and draws from theories and practices explored in chapter one to critically examine how SSHMP's archival practices work to reactivate and reanimate black American home movies. This analysis shows that, through these alternative frameworks, we see home movies transform into a series of community engagements, pedagogical tools, artistic exercises, and institutional practices.

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## **Introduction**

My interest in home movies dates back to when I was a child. As a means to unite my family, I would occasionally put on one of the dozens of 8mm home movies my father or grandfather shot of us. Slowly, members of my family would trickle into the living room, sit down on the couch, and provide unique commentary about the people, places, and activities that were being projected. I remember my eagerness to discover my family's rich history through these personal reflections. As I grew older, and after exhausting my own family's home movie collection, I began to look at the home movies of others. This would start with the discovery of online archives such as the Prelinger Archives based in San Francisco, where I would spend hours sifting through their growing collection of digitized home movies from across the United States. I, and the archive alike, relied on comments from various users to interpret the material shown in such films, which were often unauthored and unidentified. Through this practice, I unknowingly began to study and acquire knowledge of the ordinarily imperceptible cultural and social happenings across the Canadian and American landscape.

My ongoing and shifting experience with home movie viewing foregrounded my understanding of them as something other than the dormant objects that I had previously positioned them to be. I began to realize that, although home movies may present as small and simple objects – futile carriers of stagnant memories – within different frameworks and through different methodologies, they operate as a distinct form of cinematic historical knowledge. They are highly personal and yet sometimes they become part of largely impersonal modes of circulation and exhibition. Thus, in the words of French film theorist Roger Odin, throughout this thesis I am particularly interested in poaching “what happens [...] when the home movie circulates in contexts other than that of the familial” (Odin, *The home movie* 15). How are home movies inflected once they are re-positioned within the frameworks of public spaces? How does

this movement beyond their original contexts affect their new-found relevance and use and shift how we engage with them and they with us? To begin this investigation, there are some preliminary questions that must first be addressed. Namely, how can we understand and define home movies in the present day? In what ways and in what capacity do they ask us to act on their behalf? What do we need to do in order to ensure their continued vitality as cultural forms? I will ask these questions by considering how they have previously been approached and studied, as well as how they have been presently positioned and engaged with by scholars and archivists alike. I ask these questions to uncover and explore the rise of new cultural formations and public and archival institutions devoted to home movie preservation, which have been a product of, and have supported the recent growth of contemporary home movie scholarship. In looking at these alternative models and the varied practices that they have adopted, I am interested in examining the ways in which home movies are transformed and reanimated within these new frameworks; why is that knowledge important and what does it reveal? This inquiry is specifically concerned with small gauge format home movies and their emergence as cultural forms within the last couple of decades. Before I begin to answer these questions, however, it is useful to outline what has already been said about home movies and their evolution.

To better understand the evolution of home movies and how they came to be in the present, it is useful to begin this mapping at the advent of home movie technology. In 1923, Bell and Howell began their marketing campaign for their first handheld amateur film camera, the *Filmo 70* (Zimmermann, *Reel families* 29). During that same year, Kodak launched its Cine-Kodak camera and projector. While at first amateur filmmaking practices seemed to be promoted and positioned in contrast to Hollywood's commercial uses, as technology for movie equipment evolved, the standard 16mm amateur format was from the beginning "commodified into a leisure activity mining the industry" (Zimmermann, *Reel families* 31). At the time, due to the

prominence of two major manufacturers, Bell and Howell and East-man Kodak, and the production and distribution of film stock and cameras that limited other commercial competitors, home movie apparatuses were considered luxury consumer items (Zimmermann, *Reel families* 31). Amateur filmmaking practices were limited to the middle- and upper-class families who could afford novelty film equipment (Zimmermann, *Reel families* 30). In this way, much of the footage from that era depicts the lives of specific well-to-do households and communities. In the late 1960's, when home movie equipment became increasingly available, there was also a rise in the discourse of the nuclear family and the expansion and commodification of leisure time (Zimmermann, *Reel families* 32). During this period, marketing for cameras involved the depiction of family and family togetherness, but specifically the nuclear family. Accordingly, there has been much criticism of home movies' ability to be read as "authentic" reflections of personal or communal histories as they have long been marketed toward the individual as means to reproduce spectacles of a mythologized family life (Zimmermann, *Reel Families* 46). Thus, early critiques of the home movie format recognized the performative, and therefore rather dubious, nature of these types of films. Home movies have been seen as performing as a highlight reel of the lives of privileged families, recording and revealing moments of abundance such as birthdays, family vacations, and gatherings, and neglecting the unpleasantness and misfortunes of everyday life. Indeed, home movies have long been perceived as the by-product of "an irrelevant pastime;" their cultural or historical merit tainted by a lens of nostalgia and sentimentality (Ishizuka and Zimmermann 1). However, in recent decades, scholars such as Karen Ishizuka have foregrounded the importance of home movies, as they are often the only existing records of marginalized communities; although these familial texts may not represent entire histories and generally only exhibit what is deemed as significant by specific communities, they still present as important cultural and historical

documents (Ishizuka and Zimmermann 263). As Patricia Zimmerman, scholar and film professor whose research has been devoted to the reappraisal of home movies and amateur filmmaking practices states, home movies "operate as traces rather than evidence [...] they visualize historical contradictions" and resurface hidden or silenced histories through our engagement with them (Zimmermann, *Morphing history into histories* 276). Indeed, these new and evolving engagements with home movies, which positioned them as complex historical and cultural documents deserving of being preserved, introduced a wave of scholarly and institutional interest in the medium and format. As early as 1984, larger memorialization institutions such as the United States' National Center for Film and Video Preservation introduced models for the creation of specialized and regional archives which would collect and preserve home movies in their collections ("Amateur film preservation"). While their formation would take another decade or so, these models informed the introduction of home movie collections into existing archives and stimulated the creation of archives dedicated to home movies across the United States.

In the 1990's, following this initial curiosity about archival home movies, discussions of the evolution of the "archive" through academic writing such as Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1995) led to the development of alternative approaches to institutional memorialization. These new archival approaches placed a greater emphasis on the importance of preserving and mobilizing "alternative, nonmainstream, and private" histories and invited "fresh appraisals of the significance of home movies" (Rascaroli et al. 2014). Indeed, around the same time that home movies began to enter archival institutions, libraries, and museums, historians and archivists began to adopt and employ new microhistorical approaches to studying history. This relatively new type of historical framework allowed practitioners to modify the focal length of the lens in which narratives of traditional histories are captured and recorded: "microhistorians hold a microscope and not a telescope in their hands" (Magnússon and Szijártó 22). Through this

approach, the focus is shifted from generalized visions of larger societies and nations to the imperceptible and banal representations of a community, a group of families, even the individual (Cuevas 140). Together, historians and archivists quickly remarked that home movies offer this same type of microhistorical perspective, shifting our gaze to the dealings of everyday life; the banal, the habitual. Similarly, scholars such as Patricia Zimmermann, Karen L. Ishizuka and more recently, Liz Czach, have contributed to academic writing which has been fundamental to the development of the home movie as specific moving image category, cultural artifact, and archival object. Zimmermann's, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (1995), traces the history and transformation of amateur filmmaking practices, traditions, and aesthetics in America. The author was the first to position amateur film and home movies as "integral part[s] of a suppressed and discarded film history" (Zimmermann, *Reel families* xv). This is further developed during Zimmermann's collaboration with Karen L. Ishizuka for their anthology, *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories* (2008), where the authors introduce alternative approaches to film historiography which is influenced by microhistorical frameworks and establishes the home movie as method of approaching history "from below" (Ishizuka and Zimmermann 2). They define the home movie as a "vital access point for academic historiography," one which foregrounds the move from official history to the "more variegated and multiples practices of popular memory, a concretization of memory into artifacts that can be remobilized, recontextualized and reanimated" (Ishizuka and Zimmermann 1). As Odin suggests, once placed beyond their institution of origin, home movies "import valuable topics of information on whole vistas of societies that have never been documented by official information sources or through professional reporting" (Odin, *The home movie* 22). Similar questions, which deal with the evolution, importance, and methodological significance of home movies first arose during the establishment of specialized and regional archives across the world. These new

approaches were the first of their kind to suggest that home movies can resurface and reclaim lost and/or marginalized histories, thus broadening and diversifying the scope of home movie's contemporary proposed use and value.

Within the discipline of film studies and throughout small gauge cinema's history, amateur films and home movies have often been conflated. Prior to the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there was no need to distinguish between such filmic modes as only a select few home movies found themselves in archives. Even still they were often seen as peripheral items. During this period, there were very few archival institutions and organizations whose primary focus was on the home movie and its preservation, proving the broad term "amateur film" as sufficient for purposes of their description and categorization within libraries and archival institutions. However, this began to change during the late 90's and early 2000's, when institutional and academic curiosity towards the home movie as historical and cultural document came to a critical juncture. At this time, archives began to shift their focus onto the home movie, pursuing the goal of acquiring and preserving said films within their collections. One of the most notable organizations devoted to the discovery, celebration, and preservation of home movies was and remains The Center for Home Movies (CHM), a non-profit organization founded in 2005 by a group of archivists and home movie enthusiasts who had previously founded Home Movie Day (HMD), recognized the importance and significance of establishing a model of preservation devoted to this previously delineated form of film production (Smith 139-140). I will be elaborating on the functions of CHM and their role in organizing HMD events later on in this thesis. For now, what is important to note at this time is that CHM has and continues to serve as an unofficial "home movie headquarters" for the network of worldwide home movie organizations and archives.

As home movies continued to acquire cultural credibility and historical merit through the 2000's, in 2010, there came a request from the Library of Congress to establish a working Home Movie Taxonomy, a solicitation born out of “the desire to identify outstanding Home Movies as candidates for the National Film Registry” (Becker et al. 10). The immediate quandary that home movie archivists and scholars faced was “how to identify and choose among this enormous mass of material exemplary films worthy of elevation to this list?” (Becker et al. 10). Before this point, home movies had been treated as a mere subset of amateur films - the scope of their contents generally over-looked. However, this request quickly revealed the distinct yet diverse nature of the film mode. There existed many different *kinds* of home movies that operated as very different media objects than “amateur films” (Becker et al. 11).

In a 2010 “Digitization and Access Summit report,” home movie archivists, scholars, and enthusiasts from across the globe worked together to assign to home movies a standardized vocabulary and identify specific aesthetic tropes and formal practices unique to the medium (Becker et. al). This document suggests that home movie's casual leisure production value, subject matter and intended audience make it so that these filmic texts present and operate as distinct media texts and cultural forms, one which differentiates itself from amateur film. The Home Movie Summit attendees provided a working taxonomy which defined the home movies as a “home-made motion picture created by individuals primarily for an intended audience of family members and friends within the immediate circle of the home” (Becker et al. 11). Additionally, they specified that the subject matter must include family members, events, and activities, that the film be handled and kept in a home setting and that the film material be in its original popular consumer gauge format (9.5mm, 16mm, 8mm, Super8) (Becker et. al 11). This definition proves quite different from “amateur film,” which they described as motion pictures that aim for a wider

demographic, generally reproduced into multiple prints or copies with the intention and/or possibility of being distributed and exhibited to the public (Becker et. al 11).

Looking beyond the rubric set forth by the Summit, contemporary scholars have identified additional demarcations. In her research, Liz Czach, scholar and film programmer, explains that while serious intention is usually prescribed to the activity of planning and shooting amateur films, home movies take on a more casual leisure approach to film production, exhibited by their “point and shoot” aesthetic (Czach 30). Aesthetically, amateur films are often ambitious and carefully constructed. While they may be experimental works, amateur films are often identifiable through their narrative structures and their adherence to pre-existing genre conventions. Conversely, home movies have little to no visible editing and are referred to being “genre-less” and “plot-less”. While out-ward looking amateur films are generally authored and produced for public consumption, home movies have a limited audience, primarily consisting of family and friends, and their origins are often undisclosed. While Czach acknowledges home movies are distinct from amateur films, she suggests that the two lie on opposite ends of a nonprofessional production spectrum (Czach 30). Similarly, Charles Tepperman provides useful insights on the differences between amateur films and home movies. In his tracings of the development of amateur cinema, he acknowledges the foundational and technological similarities that establish a connection between both forms of filmmaking, for example, both use small-gauge formats as methods of production (Tepperman 25). However, like the Summit contributors and Czach, Tepperman distinguishes the home movie from the amateur film through their distinct narrative functions, production contexts, and exhibition practices.

Based on their origins and defining characteristics, it is understood that home movies have been primarily distinguished and defined on account of their unwavering proximity to the personal and family institution and space. Within these parameters, their function and

significance remain tied to the home and to rituals of memorializing and reminiscing, both shared and independent activities. It is important to point out that these definitions foreground the assumption that, generally, home movies are positioned as unchanging objects that reside within domestic and private settings. Yet, through the impact of what scholars and archivists have yielded during the last 20 years, the continued and evolving interest in home movies has also seen them become public events, community engagements, and institutional practices with geographies ranging from the local to the global. Indeed, this new wave of home movie scholarship has introduced the emergence of new archival institutions and cultural formations that boast alternative archival practices and methodologies, that have been adapted and applied to best address and work through these film texts as we understand them today. In this way, this thesis' aim is to contribute to contemporary scholarship by exploring the ways in which home movies are acquiring importance, revealing new insights, and creating new practices that are transforming engagement with them outside of their original contexts. To address these questions, I will be examining the various methods in which home movies have been addressed and mobilized through two different case studies that focus on the workings of contemporary archival institutions and cultural formations whose focus is on the home movie.

The first chapter of this thesis will be dedicated to the critical examination of Home Movie Day (HMD), with a specific focus on the various methods of archival intervention applied to the home movie and exercised at HMD events. HMD has helped to create widespread interest in the potentialities of home movies. The international event has played and continues to play a significant role in positioning and legitimizing home movies as historical and cultural texts. This chapter will be divided into two parts. First, I will be conducting a close analysis of the different archival, historical, and representational methodologies that have been emulated within the HMD model. Here, I will be focusing on the initial inspection of the home movie and the practices and

modes of engagement involved in its screening. In the second half of this chapter, I will be conducting a close analysis of the event's working model, paying close attention to the ways in which these events integrate and apply the various methodologies used to address and work through home movies outside of their original context discussed in the first half of this chapter.

In chapter 2, I will investigate the home movie in the context of a specialized community archive: The Southside Home Movie Project (SSHMP). The Southside Home Movie Project is a non-profit organization housed in the University of Chicago that is dedicated to collecting, preserving, and animating home movies from Chicago's South Side, which has been and continues to be a pre-dominantly black community. SSHMP remains an important point of entry for the analysis of archival methodologies and practices that have been adopted by institutions as they have overtly prioritized and responded to issues of race and representation within their archival framework and throughout their programming. This chapter will also be divided in two parts. In the first half of this chapter, I will be positioning and contextualizing the archive in relation to the history and institutions it succeeds and responds to, with a specific focus on 20<sup>th</sup> century mainstream American cinema, its dealings with race, and the early black American experience it informed. In the second half of this chapter, I will be conducting a close analysis of SSHMP's archival framework. I will be critically exploring the archive's unique model for preserving and activating home movies within and beyond the archive. Here, I will be paying close attention to the ways in which the archive has adapted their practices to better acknowledge and address issues of race and diversity.

To conclude this thesis, I will be summarizing my findings and looking at HMD and SSHMP in comparison to one another. Here, I will be focusing on how, while HMD has made significant contributions to the evolution and mobilization of home movies, SSHMP has provided

a timely reframing to their contemporary relevancy and use, and has in many ways, responded to the shortcomings of the HMD model.

**Chapter 1:**  
**Home Movies and their Public Lives: Conceptualizing Home Movies through the Home Movie Day Model**

**1.1 Initial Interventions**

On Sunday March 19<sup>th</sup> 2023, I attended my first Home Movie Day. This event was organized by Cinema Public, a local cinema project housed in Villeray's Casa d'Italia, and Fragments Fugaces, a Montreal-based initiative that celebrates amateur family films. I arrived a little late and sat down as the home movies were already being screened. As I settled into my seat, I watched two kids, who I assumed were siblings, run around a vast green open field, chasing after one another in what, without sound, appeared to be a fit of laughter. The little girl wore a red blouse with a puritan collar, a plaid beige skirt, and white knee-high socks with scuffed mary janes. The boy sported a crisp white dress shirt with beige shorts and similar knee-high socks that complimented his oxford-looking brown shoes. The two children ran after each other until they reached a mass of boulders. As the children began to climb atop the rather large formation of rocks, the camera slowly panned to the right, revealing an abundant terrain of grass, burgeoning flowers and tree-lined pathways that provided shelter for pedestrians. Who are these children? Is this Montreal? I thought to myself. The room, filled with nothing more than the sound of the old projector's hum, was rather quiet. While I have always been accustomed to silence during film screenings, particularly from audience members, there was an inexplicable emptiness that filled the room. Finally, I could hear the woman sitting in front of me whisper to herself: "it would be great to know where and what we're looking at". Suddenly, one of the two older men behind me asked: "that looks like Parc La Fontaine, I remember it looking that way, is that Parc La Fontaine?" Co-organizer and founding member of Fragments Fugaces, Emmanuel Martin-Jean, explained that it was indeed Parc La Fontaine, and that this reel had been donated

by a Québécois family that lived in the adjacent neighborhood during the 1960's. As the screenings and audience interjections continued, each home movie came to life. I, along with the other audience members, grew more and more curious about what was being projected: What were we looking at? Why were we seated in a dark room watching home movies with strangers? Why hold an event dedicated to the home movie? What were these films telling us and why does it matter?

In light of my own experience, I begin this section with a simple, yet critical, question: how have home movies previously been studied and approached and why is this work important? While we have briefly discussed the emergence and evolution of home movies – how they have been positioned alongside the development of archival and amateur film scholarship over the past couple of decades – to best define and understand the home movie in the present, it is essential that we consider the variety of strategies and methodologies that have been applied to studying home movies, by scholars, archivists, and even users of the archive. As we have come to understand, home movies have long resided at the margins of film studies, an academic discipline that has long held big-budget, feature-length narrative films as its central focus. Whether it be due to the ongoing conflation of amateur film and the home movie or home movies' apparent inherent ambiguity, traditional film studies approaches (such as focusing on directors as auteurs or analysis of genre in commercial or art films, to name but two) prove insufficient in studying such texts. Recent reflections regarding the state of home movie scholarship have revealed that home movies have often found themselves at the hands of scholars in disciplines outside of cinema studies (Becker et. al 91). Much of the home movie's modes of analysis have been interdisciplinary in nature, moving beyond the narrow scope of methodologies offered by film studies, to introduce valuable and timely contributions from archivists, collectors, and even anthropologists, historians, and sociologists (Becker et. al 91). Rather than focus on close

analysis, contributions from these other disciplines have offered up new ways to understand home movies, including as valuable texts that provide insights into everyday domestic life and cultural rituals.

In what follows, I will be discussing contemporary scholarship which employs the various methodologies that have been applied to studying, activating, and reanimating home movies. I am particularly interested in critically examining the ways in which these methodologies and practices have been adopted and emulated by new institutions and cultural formations committed to preserving traces and visualizations of domesticity and private life. Through this discussion, I am interested in uncovering and highlighting how the ways in which we address, approach, and engage with home movies affect their contemporary use and value beyond the family home. Additionally, in doing this work, I hope to answer some of the questions that persisted during my own encounter with home movies at these alternative infrastructures. For this first chapter, the analysis of Home Movie Day will map the interdisciplinary methodologies of archival intervention which have been specifically developed by HMD members to better represent the complexities and approaches to home movies. They begin during the preparatory stages of projection and extend into the screening program.

## **1.2 Theories, Concepts, and Methodologies of Approaching Home Movies**

Before we begin to critically analyse the various methodologies that are applied during HMD events, let us first briefly examine the general process and schedule that shapes HMD programming. HMD is structured in two distinct parts: the first being home movie inspection and the second being home movie screenings. When participants arrive at a HMD event, which generally takes place in an archive or cultural centre, they are greeted by HMD hosts and are invited to inspect and handle film that they or other participants have brought to screen. Film inspection usually lasts about an hour or two, depending on the schedule as well as how many

participants attend and/or bring films. While HMD hosts and volunteers set up for projection, participants are invited to trickle into the screening room, ask questions about the material or equipment, and prepare for the second half of the event. Once everything is set up and participants have settled in, the screening portion of HMD events begin. Screenings last between two to three hours. While the screening segments can take on a variety of structures, they generally include a discussion section, which may occur during or after screenings. When screenings are done, participants are invited to linger and reflect on the event, the films that were screened, and the discussions that arose.

As discussed, HMD events generally begin with film inspection. This initial HMD inspection serves as an introductory framework for curious attendees, where participants begin to acquire the technical, and arguably foundational, knowledge required to maintain and care for small gauge formats. Marsha Gordon and Dino Everett remind us how valuable physical manipulation of and care for the film material itself is for home movie preservation, specifically. They explain how the archival processes of film identification, inspection, and description serve a dual purpose in regard to small-gauge film preservation. They argue that preserving the integrity of a film's format is equally as important as preserving its contents, particularly as content often migrates through different forms and processes of duplication or digitization (Gordon and Everett 141). I suggest that this is especially crucial for film forms such as home movies as both their contents and their formats have frequently been positioned as "dead, inert, ghostly, decayed" (Zimmermann, *The Home Movie Archive Live* 258). In North America, home movies are most commonly shot in 8mm, Super 8, and 16mm formats and require specialized equipment and training to be screened in their original format. According to Snowden Becker, archivist and one of the founding members of CHM, HMD events focus on home movie films rather than home video because such formats are less accessible and familiar to the general public (22). It must be

noted that Becker's argument reveals an ongoing gap in contemporary home movie scholarship. As it pertains to questions of access, preservation, and reanimation, much of the research that has been conducted by home movie scholars and archivists has generally been concerned with small gauge film. This reflects a belief that, due to time elapsed and lack of use, film remains in a more precarious state than video technologies. And while an exploration of the status and importance of home video preservation falls outside of the scope of this thesis, it bears noting the significance and value of the format. Although home video bears great resemblance to its predecessor, it provides unique interpretations, approaches, and contributions to home movie scholarship. In any case, as both Gordon and Everett argue, screening older films such as home movies using historical equipment, such as projectors, "is something of a lacuna in the field of moving image archiving outside of 35 and 16mm" (143). Today, these small gauge formats are generally handled by living family members who often have little to no knowledge about how to handle, screen, or care for these historical formats. Due to inexperience, these home movies are generally digitized by their successors. While it has been argued that digitization diminishes the risk of damaging fragile, historical documents, this process of content-centric preservation eradicates the precise qualities that make home movies so culturally and historically interesting, such as their distinct aesthetic qualities, method of capture, and specific modes of exhibition (Gordon and Everett). Additionally, once digitized, original film materials are often completely discarded. Acknowledging the threat that this poses to 20<sup>th</sup> century home movies, Becker states: "Amateur footage has defining characteristics—it is enormously plentiful, each reel is unique, and the bulk of it is in the care of individuals, not institutions—which render the traditional “preserve first, access later” archival strategies impracticable. [...] The HMD founders saw barriers to access as being the primary barriers to preservation: If people didn't know what their films looked like, they would have no sense of the cultural heritage that would be lost if those

films deteriorated beyond salvation. Visibility becomes value; value becomes care; and care over time equals security" (21-22). These four pillars - visibility, value, care, and security – are essential for all forms of preservation, but they are especially important for small gauge formats such as home movies. Indeed, to resuscitate and make visible this vibrant area of film activity, users, institutions, and organizations must have access to their home movies as well as any equipment they would need to screen said films, practice sustainable techniques, and adopt ethical practices for their preservation and create collaborative and accessible spaces and events where knowledge can be shared and preserved for future generations. If, as Becker suggests, the issue of identifying and watching home movies remains the primary barrier to home movie preservation, we can see how HMD's commitment to inspecting and projecting home movies in their original formats alongside participants addresses this specific initial concern. Gordon and Everett describe this type of archival intervention as "preservation through use," where inspection and projection themselves function as means for preservation (144). Like Zimmermann has argued, I suggest that this approach to home movie preservation is especially relevant as it foregrounds our understanding of home movies as a series of practices, representations, and engagements, rather than as mere material and aesthetic objects. Although it can be argued that screenings take on the more central and arguably more crucial, role as it relates to activating and reanimating the contents of home movies in the HMD model, one must consider the indispensable contribution that inspection, identification, and manipulation of the material itself plays in this process.

As they are, home movies exist as familial objects that generally communicate within the frameworks of what Richard Chalfen, scholar and past president of the Society of Visual Anthropology, terms as the "Home Mode": "a pattern of interpersonal and small group communication centered around the home" (Chalfen 8). In his *Snapshot Versions of Life* (1987),

the author foregrounds the social processes associated with home movies' communications channels, emphasizing that home movies communicate different messages and narratives depending on who is watching, where they are watching it and in what context. Chalfen's approach is concerned with how the medium is being *used* by its viewer(s), considering that we understand the viewer to be both a consumer of media and producer of meaning (Chalfen 9).

While Chalfen's inquiry is most explicitly concerned with an exploration of the cultural and social dimensions of amateur photography specifically, what is important to note from Chalfen's research is how he has positioned the "Home Mode" as a framework which is primarily defined by its audience. The use of the word "home" in Chalfen's pictorial communication system is less a literal reference than it is a signifier of the private or personal realm. Within the "home mode," "identification and relationship of the viewer to the imagery are important at every turn," the author explains that "the important point is that when strangers look at home mode imagery, or when snapshots or home movies are shown in non-home mode contexts, the images are subjected to a variety of [alternative] interpretive schemes" (Chalfen 123). This theory, that the meanings of home movies are shaped by the context in which they are viewed and through different forms of audience engagement and intervention is later elaborated by film theorist Roger Odin. Odin introduces a new semio-pragmatic model for studying home movies. Briefly, his approach is concerned with how the textual and contextual components of familial texts are influenced and affected by different forms of exhibition and spectatorship. Like Chalfen's "home mode," Odin suggests that, within the context of family viewing, watching home movies summons what he calls the "private mode" of viewing, where the film recalls an individual or group past (Odin, *Reflections on the Family* 255). However, Odin argues that the home movie does not communicate, rather, it urges its viewer to "use a double process of remembering" (Odin, *Reflections on the Family* 259). This process involves both individual and collective

remembering, where individual experience forms collective memory through collaborative reconstruction of a mythical family history (Odin, *Reflections on the Family* 259). Odin reminds us that, like Chalfen's "home mode," the private mode summons a production of meaning that remains fixed to a certain "axis of relevance," the family institution. In the private mode, home movies operate as "stimulants of memory and of relations [...] the importance lies less in what they show or say, than in the labor of memory to which they give rise, and the link that they create (or reinforce) between recipients" (Odin, *The home movie* 23). In either case, the authors identify how home movies have been understood and looked at within the private realm, otherwise addressed by Odin as the family communication space. However, with home movie's relatively recent introduction into public sectors, institutions, and communities, a new set of questions begin to arise, namely, how are home movies being used *outside* of their prescribed framework? How are they approached, understood, and used by individuals that are outside of the family unit?

Indeed, within these new, public frameworks, home movies demand alternative forms and degrees of engagement, interrogation, and contextualization. Blouin Jr. and Rosenberg remind us that, like other historical or cultural documents, home movies "can read meaning back into the past only through an interpreter, which is to say through the contextualized understandings of their user" (3). Unlike more traditional film texts, as Cecilia Mörner points out, textual analysis alone is insufficient for the study and contextualization of home movies. Originally intended to be made and screened for a limited and private audience, home movies cannot be approached like traditional film texts, which uphold distinct aesthetic and formal codes that are less private and more cultural and widely held. As we have come to learn, home movies' defining characteristics – their lack of narrative, sound, and title, their proximity to the family unit and home and their association to memory – mean they operate much differently than traditional film texts. In this

way, home movie contextualization must consider and respond to the format's unique aesthetic and formal qualities, which function as an extension of the family, most specifically the home moviemaker.

Marianne Hirsch suggests that our understanding of familial texts is largely shaped by the “familial gaze – the powerful gaze of familiarity which imposes and perpetuates certain conventional images of the familial” (11). In this way, the home movie camera functions as a metaphor for the familial gaze, constructing identity and symbolic representation within each frame (Smith 67). While home movie making is an act of documentation, it is also “a narrative of the home moviemaker's likes and interests, their sports team allegiances, and perhaps even their family relations” (Smith 67). To read a home movie from a position external to its familial modes of representation is to disrupt and reshape its primary form of mediation and interpolation. How, then, can we approach the home movie in a way that both maintains and unsettles these complex familial systems at play, which conserves their familial markings yet equally allows for a distanced, critical reading of their cultural contents? While Odin has previously introduced the concept of “de-framed” readings – shifting from the familial to the cultural frame – Ashley Smith cautions this approach, drawing our attention to the ambiguity of home movies, in both their contents and origins when positioned outside of the family sphere, and how these ambiguities operate as limitations when frameworks are shifted. Concretely, she calls attention to how this type of shift denies the personal and subjective traces, namely the specific places, people, and experiences that imbue the images, that are materialized in home movies, producing “impossible objective readings” (Smith 73). Reading home movies as a cultural or historical document demands what Smith describes as a “cross-framed” reading where “both the original familial frame as well as the cultural frame can be employed simultaneously” (68).

In the early 2000's, during the emergence of new archival institutions and cultural formations dedicated to the home movie such as HMD, scholars and archivists began to find ways to wrestle with interpreting home movies out-of-context and in-context, and turned to cross-disciplinary, ethnographic methodologies as a means to study home movies. Like Hirsch, Susan Aasman reminds us that home movie's function "less as factual documents and more as signs, as signifiers, and thus as mediated and ever-changing constructions" (246). As discussed through Hirsch's concept of the "familial gaze," home movies visualize and project a subjective, mythologized perspective of "objective" reality. They operate as open texts where personal memory and collective history are intricately entangled within each frame (Zimmermann, *Morphing history into histories* 111). In an interview with Guy Edmonds, the founders of l'Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia in Bologna, Italy, briefly discuss the importance and value that engaging ethnographic methodologies in the pursuit of home movie meaning making has had within their own practice of archiving and preserving home movies. Traditionally, this type of research and practice involves creating a point of connection with the participant and conducting interviews where participants are provided the space to speak to their lived experiences. This more holistic, collaborative, and participant-centric approach to home movie contextualization is especially useful since, as the founders of l'Archivio Nazionale de Film di Famiglia remind us, working with home movies means working on "filmic material that is perhaps nearest to oral histories or autobiography [...] Memories recorded onto film mean that you need to provoke a reaction between the footage and the people to recontextualize the old images" (Edmonds et al. 424). Similarly, Jacqueline Stewart, scholar and founder of the South Side Home Movie Project (SSHMP), contends that home movies necessitate alternative approaches, movements, and formations to meaning making, primarily ones which look to foreground the diverse voices, perspectives, and experiences of the user (*Giving Voice, Taking*

*Voice* xii). Thinking back to Smith's definition of cross-framed readings, we can see how the discussed home movie archives engage both the familial and cultural frameworks in their applied methodologies as well as their organized home movie interventions. Indeed, this applies to HMD's working model as well. While the HMD interface provides a space for secure inspection and screening, handles the film, and gathers and shares useful information about the format, the user makes sense of the home movies' images, imbuing each home movie with their own knowledge and experience. The former operates outside of the private or family mode of viewing, the latter, which is bound to Hirsch's concept of the "familial gaze," emerges from the more personal framework of Odin's familial space. As Becker states: "Dialogues between home movie owners and the friends and strangers [which include the archivists and technicians] watching their footage help convey the historical and documentary significance of each reel beyond its narrow family context" (23). These types of methodologies, which aim to read home movies ethnographically, necessitate that we look at the human experience as "a site for knowledge," one which can begin to address the gaps between private or collective memory and official history (Mörner 26).

Access and outreach events such as Home Movie Day initiate the process of a particular sort of representation, one which seeks to foreground and validate the faces, voices, and stories of those that have been left out of traditional record-keeping practices and therefore dominant histories, but it does so within a public and community-oriented framework. As we have seen, the participatory nature of said events produce a collaborative space where archivists and participants work together to extract, articulate and crystallize new forms of historical and cultural representation. Elizabeth Yakel, archivist, researcher, and educator, argues that within the field of archival sciences, the term "representation" has quickly come to encompass both "the process and activity" of representing, as well as the "object(s) produced by an instance of that activity" (151).

For cases such as HMD, we understand the former as being the exercise of identifying, describing and contextualizing home movies which have been screened for members of the community, where said members take part in the archival process. The latter part of this definition refers to the historical and cultural documents that are produced and the methods of categorization that are applied during and after this type of participatory "representation," which includes the archival home movie. What is useful to note from her exploration is how she positions the creator and the archivist as equally as important within the representational scheme of organizing knowledge. Echoing Odin, Zimmermann, and Becker, Yakel's infrastructural approach to questions of representation, preservation, and access reinforces the idea that, to uncover sincere, transparent, and dependable representation through primary sources such as home movies, it is crucial that we engage with and find balance between the self-reflexive and the functional, between the familial and the cultural frame. And that this includes institutional processes that constitute archival practices. To understand home movies is to complicate and unsettle the ways in which we have previously addressed and approached traditional film texts. As Zimmermann states, home movies operate as "a series of power relations and negotiations between dominant film practices and marginal ones, between privileged knowledges and delinquent ones," between evidence and interpretation (Zimmermann, *Morphing history into histories* 114). In this way, we can begin to understand home movie projects such as HMD and SSHMP as beginning this process of (re)presentation which takes place in dialogue with previous film practices, including large format commercial and art cinemas.

What we must now consider more closely is how the home movie's historical and cultural gaps and findings have been looked at and addressed outside of the family home. Most specifically, what do these reflections tell us and why are they important? I begin this inquiry with a concentration on a singular, yet amorphous, term that we have just briefly encountered:

representation. In one way or another, all home movies resemble one another. This is especially true of home movies coming from the same region or community. Home movies reproduce visual records of family members and their activities inside and outside of the home, generally capturing similar themes of family life in a particular (anti)aesthetic. In this way, we are reminded that there is a certain difficulty which arises from home movies. As previously discussed, the home movie, while often described as genre-less, maintains a certain thematic formula. Home movies very rarely reveal disfunction or disarray in family life; they generally maintain the heteronormative stereotypes upon which they were built, recreating the likes of the nuclear family through the same set of images of habitual rituals, family ceremonies, and celebrations. As a result, there has been critique of home movies as being deceptive in their ability to present as historic and/or cultural document. As James M. Moran, professor and scholar, argues in his book *There's no place like home video* (1998), there is much staging and selectivity that is involved when filming a home movie. While in his article Odin positions this as a potential limitation for the mode, acknowledging that only certain slices of life are deemed worthy of documentation, he, like Yakel, also argues that this makes them powerful sources of representability. This representability is activated once these familial texts are placed alongside one another, revealing larger parts of a region's cultural memory and history through the repetition of images: places, events, and people. As Smith suggests, this "seemingly paradoxical" facet of the home movie, that they are in outward presence essentially all the same, and yet maintain significantly different meanings for viewers, is precisely why they have been considered by and introduced to archival institutions, both private and public, as rich historical and cultural sources (44).

It has only been within the last couple of decades that home movies began to find their place within public and private archives. This occurred around the same time that historians and archivists began to adopt and employ new microhistorical approaches to studying history.

Historians such as Carlo Ginzberg, Edoardo Grendi, and Giovanni Levi proposed that the large, rather broad, narratives presented by traditional history could not represent or capture the true significance of an era and its people (Cuevas 140). This movement towards new approaches of studying history fuelled a new-found appreciation for and acknowledgement of home movies as historical documents largely because such films were understood to offer this same type of microhistorical perspective, always directed towards individuals and families, and focused on the "small scale of their environments" (Cuevas 141). In his seminal work, historian Pierre Nora discusses the relationship between official history and private memory. History is generally modeled as the reputable and official story of the victorious, while memory often presents itself as "the democratic enterprise of oral traditions, folklore and material culture" (Legg 481).

However, Nora reminds us that the two are not mutually exclusive, that "the quest for memory is the search for one's history" (13). Similarly, James Fentress suggests that history itself "is both a product and a source of social memory" (viii). In this way, as a means of redefining traditional historiography and problematizing privileged official histories, it is essential that we shift our gaze and look towards the ordinary dealings and representations of everyday life - the private memories of communities, families, individuals. Microhistorians have argued that this type of scale adjustment and microscopic investigation reveals previously marginalized realities and phenomena that have been overlooked or suppressed by hegemonic history, which is generally distorted by the macro-level approach of "generalization and quantitative formalization" (Levi 105-106). As it pertains to home movies, specifically, Roger Odin reminds us that home movies are often the only type of documentation that exists of certain racial, ethnic, and cultural communities discounted by traditional archival institutions (*Reflections on the Family*, 263).

While I will be engaging more thoroughly and critically with issues of diversity and representations of race during my study of The South Side Home Movie Project in chapter 2, it

should be stated that, as an effort to foreground marginalized voices and unsettle and expand upon existing Western archival frameworks, home movies provide an opportune point of entry.

### **1.3 Home Movie Day**

Home Movie Day (HMD) was founded in 2002 by a collective of film archivists in the United States. Every year since then, the month of October initiates public screenings of home movies in archives, community centres, libraries, and film societies around the world. Although each HMD event is hosted independently, they are collectively managed and mobilized through Center for Home Movie (CHM), a non-profit organization founded in 2005 by a group of archivists and home movie enthusiasts with a mission to provide individuals with the knowledge and tools to collect, preserve, and promote home movies (Smith 139-140). According to CHM, the roots of Home Movie Day date back to 2002, when a collective of home movie enthusiasts and dedicated archivists from the United States recognized the existing threat posed to 20th century home movies that were not being preserved or cared for properly. They had grown increasingly aware of how many home movies - family memories, regional reflections, microhistorical narratives - would be otherwise abandoned in musty basements or cramped attics due to neglect or inaccessibility to required equipment such as projectors. These initial concerns and observations motivated the group of archivists to develop and organize out-reach events whose mission would be twofold: to inform the public on how to best care for these objects and to foreground their value and animate their cultural and historical dimensions through community outreach.

CHM operates as a centralized platform for potential HMD hosts. On their website, CHM supplies potential hosts with the necessary tools and resources to begin preparing and developing their local HMD event. While the organization adapts their working-model to best suit the needs of local hosts, their "How-to HMD 2022" page outlines the general event-planning scheme and

provides useful information about equipment, supplies, scheduling, advertising, and streaming. This section of their website also offers a directory of both past and upcoming HMD events, previous and current HMD locations, and worldwide HMD news for reference and consultation. Over the past couple of decades, their website has grown to be an important online repository, as well as vital access point, for all those interested in home movies. In this way, the organization has offered significant contributions to the evolution of HMD, most concretely in helping to extend its global reach. At the time of its launch, in 2003, HMD took place at several locations scattered across the United States, Mexico, Canada and Japan. In 2019, this map has expanded to archives, libraries and historical societies across Europe, Asia, Australia and even Russia, boasting more than 30 participating countries (“Annual Report”). In just under 20 years, Home Movie Day has transformed and evolved from a relatively unknown, underground event dedicated to the preservation of home movies to a new international cultural formation that remains dedicated to the recognition and animation of home movies, neglected histories, and untold narratives.

While CHM serves as the umbrella organization for HMD events, local HMD organizers are given the liberty to structure their HMD event to best suit the needs and interests of their community. HMD events are generally comprised of two main activities: home movie inspection and home movie viewing. CHM provides HMD organizers with a variety of HMD programs to best suit the goals of the location. These include models such as “pre-recorded screenings,” where organizers curate a selection of home movies prior to the event day and accompany the program with live narration and discussion and “narrated pre-recorded screenings,” where home movies are screened on a rolling basis and are accompanied by commentary and discussion from a live audience (“How-to HMD 2022”). While each HMD event requires a screening component, local hosts are encouraged to supplement their events with other activities and workshops

devoted to home movies. Over the past two decades, HMD screenings have rescued a large number of home movies and have supported their preservation on both a personal and institutional level (Gordon and Everett 145). As stated by CHM, screenings are an integral component of the HMD model as they work towards Home Movie Day's founding mission: providing the public with the opportunity to view and preserve their films and highlighting the difference between film and video through a specific exhibition of the former ("How-to HMD 2022).

One of the major concerns brought up by the collective of archivists that founded HMD was the lack of public awareness regarding how to best preserve, handle, and care for small-gauge film. As stated by CHM, the founding members recognized that many families owned home movies that had not been seen due to inaccessibility to equipment and lack of knowledge as it pertains to how to handle such material. It is for this reason that HMD events generally begin with film inspection. Upon arrival, attendees are invited to consult with an on-site volunteer archivist and/or preservationist who will inspect their home movies, which includes checking for vinegar syndrome (chemical decay of the celluloid), mothballs, mold, shrinkage, and perforations of the film stock. If any of the following is identified, the archivist and/or preservationist will try to repair the film(s). This archival practice provides many first-time film users with the necessary information concerning how to best identify, handle, and care for small-gauge films. Becker explains how, during the initial assessment, attendees who have brought home movies are encouraged to physically follow along with the appointed archivist or technician as they work through their films (23). This provides the archivist or technician with the opportunity to communicate important information about the film, such as its overall condition, its age, if there is any damage, and if so, what kind. Additionally, this process usually generates preliminary discussions about the contents of the films; where they were shot, who is in them, and what they

are doing. This beginning portion of HMD events relates back to Gordon and Everett's theory of "preservation through use," where the act of handling, caring for and inspecting film as part of HMD initiates and feeds the rationale that use is integral to preservation itself. Further, HMD's initial film inspection sustains a collaborative user-centric approach, assuring that participants have the required knowledge, skills, and tools to work through their own collection of home movies.

Even so, it should be noted that not all HMD events offer or participate in this initial assessment procedure, most often due to limitations on time. Various HMD hosts request that potential home movie donors forward their films to an archive or repository of their choosing weeks prior to the event so that the film assessment can be done in advance. In this event, home movie donors are often asked to provide additional information concerning the origins and contents of the film, which is generally done through a document supplied by the HMD hosts. During these types of HMD events, hosts may or may not choose to include an assessment station and the event day generally consists of continuous live screenings of home movies. While this is sometimes the case, what remains crucial to these HMD models is the presence of informed and resourceful volunteers that can share information with the public concerning the identification, care, and handling of small gauge films.

HMD operates as a living, ongoing experiment, continuously adapting its model to transform and reanimate home movies into ethical, meaningful, and significantly rich historical and cultural material, while honouring their original intended use. Like other organizations and institutions that deal with archival material, it is important for HMD hosts to maintain a working model that aligns with and adheres to the ethical principles of archival practice. According to the Society of American Archivists (SAA), this entails committing to a code of ethics that promotes and supports access, accountability, diversity, preservation, and responsible stewardship, to name

but a few (“SAA Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics”). For HMD events, the process and responsibility of handling private and personal material such as home movies foreground specific ethical considerations that relate to issues of privacy and access. In a document by Liz Coffey, designed to prepare HMD hosts for the event day, the author, in collaboration with CHM, explains that there are specific protocols for film “donation” or check-in during HMD events (Coffey). The inspection process begins with having the donor read and sign a release form. The release form, which is provided by CHM on their documents page, is a two-page document. The first page, titled “Participant Information Sheet,” requires the user to fill out their personal information, such as their name, address, phone number, and e-mail. Additionally, it provides the user with space to describe the film(s) that they have brought and requests the authority to contact them regarding future projects such as home movie compilations. The “Release Form for Projection and Viewing,” which defines the terms on which home movies are donated by users, finds itself on the second page of this document. This contract specifies that HMD hosts, volunteers, and archivists are not responsible for potential damage to films inspected and/or screened at HMD and that it is up to the discretion of the appointed archivist and projectionist to decide which home movies are screened during the day of the event (Coffey). It should be noted that during HMD events home movies are not donated, rather, they are lent to HMD hosts to inspect and later screen. However, HMD hosts are encouraged to offer information about donating home movies to local or national archives. According to Coffey, along with encouraging participants to donate their film(s), all hosts must equally instruct participants to avoid discarding original film after transferring it to video and/or digital formats. Although home movies are not donated, HMD hosts are responsible for establishing specific “procedures and policies to protect the interest of the [...] individuals, groups, and organizations whose public and private lives and activities are documented” in the home movies (“SAA Core Values Statement

and Code of Ethics”). As discussed, to reanimate these types of texts, collaboration is crucial. HMD hosts must be committed to “making ethical and transparent decisions about how to provide care for the documents, records, and materials entrusted to them” (“SAA Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics”). In many ways, HMD’s working model actively challenges the power imbalances that generally occur between institution and donor, and which oftentimes exist within traditional archival institutions. The agreement formed between HMD organizers and donors, as well as the donor’s participation in the aforementioned archival processes, creates an alternative archival framework which positions the donor/user as an integral constituent of the archival, as well as reanimation, process.

Following inspection, HMD hosts and attendees gather for the screening portion of HMD events. HMD hosts are invited to program their screenings to best fit their needs. However, it is generally recommended that HMD hosts launch into the activity with an opening statement that reintroduces the purpose of the event and lays out the order of films being screened. Additionally, it is recommended that, during this opening statement, HMD hosts provide their donors with the opportunity to introduce their films, given that they should have any additional context to provide before the screenings begin. According to Becker, 30 to 90% of HMD attendees, depending on the venue and year, do not bring home movies at all, rather, they attend HMD to merely watch the featured films (23). In any case, all HMD attendees are active participants during home movie screenings (Becker 23). During these screenings, and because most 20<sup>th</sup> century home movies are silent, attendees are encouraged to narrate over their films, contextualizing for the audience the people, places, and events that have been documented. As Becker explains, dialogues between those who have brought their own home movies and fellow participants work to extract the historical and cultural richness of each reel, beyond its original familial axis of relevance (23). This form of participatory engagement is an excellent example of Smith’s cross-framed

methodology, where we see both personal and cultural frameworks being simultaneously engaged to contextualize home movie imagery. To better understand how home movies are transformed through this form of collaborative engagement, in October 2015, Smith organized three separate HMD events in the southern United States. At her event at Delta State University in Mississippi, the author notes:

During the screening of Frisbee's film, his recollections shaped the flow of the group conversation and audience engagement with the images. We were able to enter into his oral narrative and relate back to the images based on when he turned back to them through his narration. When the orphan film was screened, the group worked together to understand what its sequences were about. The collective narrative was built on contributions from each person based on what pieces of information or insight they could provide. (154)

Oral narration, as we have seen through both my own and Smith's experiences, is used as a principal apparatus and guiding reference during HMD screenings. Participant narration both injects and extracts information from the image, offering and locating "embodied meanings" through personal reflections and observations (Mörner 26). This practice draws from microhistorical approaches, where narration functions as a key device. As Magnússon and Szijártó assert, "although narration is [...] a key element in all kinds of history, in microhistory the stakes are especially high. Here the research process itself becomes a subject of the historians' reflexivity" (66). What becomes most important is not the event itself but the "analytical procedure" – the act of narration – applied to studying the varied small-scale structures and dimensions of the event or object being investigated (Levi 99). It should be noted that narration can take on a variety of forms during HMD screenings. It can appear as a singular voice or a collective discussion between two or more participants. Like microhistory, it is this form of narration, which I more broadly describe as participant engagement, which acts as methodology

for working through home movies. Thus, for the case of HMD, it is not the home movie imagery itself that is especially significant, but rather, the reflections and interpretations offered by the participants that occur during the screening of said images and which illuminate the richness of this often-discarded film format. It is these forms of participatory engagement that reveal the precise historical and cultural qualities that reside beneath the surface of home movies personal reflections, and which are generally left obscured without the application of both textual and ethnographic intervention.

This is not to say that the process is always simple or provides full transparency onto the past. There are many variables and even limitations that arise. For instance, as scholars have noted, one limitation which may arise during HMD screenings is the absence of a living family member or a living paratext, which can be described as a person(s) associated or connected to the family and/or familial text. When orphan films are screened at HMD events, as was the case with my own HMD experience as well as the latter portion of Smith's, meaning making relies on the limited knowledge of the distanced participant(s), which can exacerbate interpretive gaps. While locations and events can be identified quite efficiently, what remains uncertain are the identities of the people featured, how they know one another, or how and why certain events were taking place (Mörner 34). In such cases, supplementary textual analysis, and cross-referencing, which is generally performed by a trained archivist, must be applied to extract, and produce, with as much accuracy as possible, further meaning. As Zimmermann reminds us, "the images housed in the home movie operate as "traces rather than evidence," and require continuous mining (*Morphing history into histories* 276).

During home movie screenings, HMD hosts, along with the appointed on-site archivist, provide technical assistance as well as useful technical information about the films being screened. This includes details about the film stock, discussion of different forms of degradation

that may be identified, as well as certain aesthetic and formal qualities that are prevalent with home movie making practices. According to CHM, alongside these talking points, hosts should make sure to remind participants about proper film storage, film donation, and most importantly, the importance of not discarding original film reels. HMD events generally end following the screening of home movies, although participants are invited to linger and reflect upon the event and the films seen with fellow participants and hosts. HMD hosts are encouraged to ask for feedback from attendees, noting what was successful and what can be improved for future HMD events. Additionally, it is suggested that HMD hosts write and submit a Home Movie Day Report in the days following their HMD event. In this document, hosts are asked to provide a debrief of the event. Observations and findings from these reports are later used as reference for future HMD hosts and are reviewed by CHM and later highlighted in their annual report.

To conclude this chapter, and as a means of transitioning to our next case study, I draw our attention to matters of diversity and inclusivity. As we have briefly discussed, and as Zimmermann reminds us, home movies “provide vectors into the processes of racialization, race relations, and the imaging of racial difference” (Ishizuka and Zimmermann 4). In many cases, home movies have helped resurface lost or omitted historical records and have offered corrections to “the canon of local history,” specifically as it relates to marginalized communities (Ming 304). For example, in a collection of Japanese American home movies from the 1920s and 1930s that were donated to the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, California, Karen L. Ishizuka identifies how the “intricacies and details” of these personal, familial texts in many ways refute the “popularized hegemonic images of Japanese Americans as victims in the World War II concentration camps” (Ishizuka and Zimmermann 4). However, as Stewart argues, it is these precise home movies, made by and/or for marginalized people, that have generally been “lost, largely unprotected from the ravages of time not only by archivists, but also by their

makers and distributors, and by scholars” (*Discovering Black Film History* 149). As discussed, for many decades, home movies had been positioned as a privileged media practice. Previously, home movies were generally thought to have belonged in the hands of strictly white, well-to-do families. However, in recent years, scholars and archivists have begun to actively address and challenge this unfounded prejudice. Admittedly, a great deal of work remains to be done to begin addressing these questions as they pertain to HMD and its working model. While the capacity to revive histories affected by discrimination and marginalization remains an important characteristic of the home movie, this particular facet, which has been of great interest for contemporary amateur film and home movie scholars, continues to be overlooked and undervalued by HMD and its organizing base, Center for Home Movies. Indeed, an immediate question any scholar or archivist may ask is how does HMD programming accommodate and address issues of race and/or diversity? While the CHM offers many useful resources, such as links to home movie scholarship, HMD guides and calendars, as well as access to several home movie collections, these resources are rooted in and modeled by white Western scholarship and do not prioritize, acknowledge or centre historically marginalized groups, histories, or perspectives. Admittedly, there is no discussion or allusion to issues of race and/or diversity across CHM’s platform, which unfortunately bleeds into the different global iterations of HMD’s general programming.

In any case, within the past couple of decades there has been an overt, intentional response to the lack of scholarship, as well as archival facilities, that handle, preserve, and mobilize marginalized stories across the United States, specifically. Projects such as The South Side Home Movie Project (SSHMP), which I will be covering in the second chapter of this thesis, have foregrounded questions of race and racism in both amateur film history as well as early black cinema. As Colin Williamson attests, the full history of amateur filmmaking, specifically as

it relates to home movies, “is characterized by a powerful doubling: these are predominantly marginalized films about marginalized peoples” (Williamson 106). These film texts and practices, which have consistently found themselves on the margins, demand that we carefully acknowledge and address “the discourses of race and ethnicity that are inscribed in [them]” (Williamson 106). While HMD and its multiple global iterations need still consider and implement such practices within its active framework, the momentum that HMD has created towards a movement of preserving and celebrating the rich history of forgotten or silenced histories housed within home movies cannot be denied.

As previously stated, HMD remains an important access point for contemporary scholarship that is concerned with the evolution and mobilization of home movies. The international event was the first initiative of its kind to approach, position, and mobilize home movies within the networks of alternative, outward-facing circulation and communication channels. While it can be argued that the approaches and methodologies that are being emulated and adapted within the HMD model have been previously applied to home movies during their introduction to film archives in the 90’s, these new frameworks, which engage a layer of community mediation and collaboration and which position the user as central to its meaning making practices, present and operate as very different forms of archival intervention than those that are generally engaged at larger, more traditional institutions. Like most traditional home movie viewing experiences that occur within the confines of the family home, HMD maintains a degree of intimacy, engaging within its model the “familial” mode derived from home movies, which cannot be reproduced within traditional archival infrastructures. HMD events create collaborative spaces where archivists and locals, who possess their own regional historical and cultural knowledge, work together to provide context, and assign value to home movies. The shared interests, transference of knowledge, and general working relationships that are

established among archivists, organizers, and users of the archive at such events play an important role in the transformation and reanimation of these private reels into new formations of historical and cultural knowledge (Prelinger). As we have seen, the archival practices and ethnographic approaches that are engaged at HMD events, such as the initial film inspection and home movie screenings, complicate the ways we have previously thought of and understood these film texts. In this way, we can understand that HMD is not merely about inspecting or screening home movies, rather, it operates as a multi-layered form of engagement with them – a new cultural formation and international movement which mobilizes new understandings of how we may begin to look at and use home movies in the present.

## **Chapter 2:** **Archiving South Side Stories: Home Movies as Community Media Practices**

### **2.1 A Proactive Approach**

Founded in 2005 by Professor Jacqueline Stewart of the University of Chicago, The South Side Home Movie Project (SSHMP) presents a unique working model for the preservation, exhibition, and mobilization of home movies. Admittedly, the archive embodies many of the principles that are applied and practiced within HMD's interface. Like HMD, SSHMP operates as a collaborative project which looks to foreground the historical and cultural value of small gauge home movies through community engagements such as public exhibitions, screenings, and home movie related activities. While HMD's novel approach to studying, activating, and reanimating home movies has made significant contributions to the fields of archival and amateur film studies, as we have seen, its mission and programming have failed to address and implement practices that are committed to diversity. SSHMP, in many ways, actively responds to the shortcomings of the HMD model. As Stewart describes, the archive strives to "build an alternative, accessible visual record, filling gaps in existing written and visual histories, and ensuring that the diverse experiences and perspectives of South Siders will be available to larger audiences and to future generations" ("Our Story"). Indeed, besides operating out of a specific physical locale, the project differentiates itself in its stewardship efforts, foregrounding issues of race and representation within their mission and throughout their applied archival practices and policies. This chapter aims to critically examine said practices and methodologies, identifying and analyzing the proactive results that emanate from SSHMP's overt commitment to highlighting home movies which centre marginalized voices, people, and communities. Considering this objective, before we begin closely examining The South Side Home Movie Project (SSHMP), it is useful to position and contextualize the project in relation to the *history*

and *institutions* that it succeeds and, in many ways, responds to. As Stewart contends, central to SSHMP is the “interplay of memory, personal memory, South Side location, and the politics of race and class that have been shaping and complicating [The South Side Home Movie Project] since the beginning” (“MacArthur Fellow Jacqueline N. Stewart” 24:15-24:25)

## **2.2 Revisioning Black America Through Home Movies: The Genesis of The South Side Home Movie Project**

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, America saw the genesis of two seemingly independent announcements that would signal a new wave of modernity (Caddoo 2). In 1896, Thomas Edison introduced the Vitascope, a new motion picture technology which provided individuals with the opportunity to project moving picture images onto a screen, enabling them, for the first time in history, to engage in collective film viewing (Caddoo 2). This technological innovation left Americans marveled. At around the same time, the nation, specifically the American South, saw the development and integration of a new racial order. The segregation and disenfranchisement laws, referred to as “Jim Crow,” forced black Americans into racially segregated neighborhoods and communities. In the face of extreme adversity, and “out of both choice and necessity,” Caddoo explains that black Americans began to turn towards their own institutions, creating a sense of community and a source of resilience through “modern organizational structures of black life – churches, schools, fraternal societies, women’s clubs, and businesses” (3). Moreover, the author suggests that motion pictures “played a central role in the process that reconfigured America’s black institutions, its race relations – indeed its entire cultural landscape” (3). Admittedly, following the introduction of motion picture projectors in the late 1800’s, black Americans looked to this novelty machinery as both a symbol and device for collective “racial uplift” (Caddoo 3). Black Americans could be found forming community through motion picture screenings in black churches, black social groups, even black businesses. These organized

practices and engagements, which operated as a form of collective resistance against the nation's legal rulings as well as a "fundamental arena of [black] urban life," gave impetus to the formation of modern informal black cultural circuits, which still exist today (Caddoo 7).

As a result of both the emergence of industrial capitalism and ongoing widespread racial violence, America's black populace began to migrate to urban city centers. While this migration began as early as the mid 1800's, the move from rural to urban zoning by black Americans would continue for more than a century (Caddoo 6). As black American migrants settled in their new cities, the nation saw the arrival of new black cultural and industrial practices (Caddoo 7). According to Caddoo, by the 1920's, more than 50% of Americans frequented motion picture theatres at least once a week (8). However, there remained a distinct racial division within commercial white-owned theatres. Caddoo attests that these establishments would justify this division by presenting black Americans in racially exploitative roles, where they would be depicted as "inept, promiscuous, violent, and deceitful" (8). Despite these restrictions, black moviegoing practices prevailed through both formal and informal channels. Black Americans resorted to theatres exclusively called "colored" theatres, designated for black Americans, as well as community functions and events, which offered access to "a variety of noncommercial [non-white] activities and amusements, many of which were tied to religion, education, and/or uplift," and of which included the screening and viewing of motion pictures (Stewart, *Migrating to the movies* 125). These practices and forms of black leisure reveal the variety of ways in which black Americans formed and developed institutions, networks, and channels devoted to motion picture consumption, production, and circulation as a means to "understand themselves and their shared place in the world" (Caddoo 12).

This history is especially significant to the South Side Home Movie Project (SSHMP) as much of this history and the way it has been approached by contemporary scholars has been to

focus on the project's point of origin: Chicago, specifically the South Side. Chicago, or "The Black Metropolis," has been central to discussions of the black experience in America as it has been and remains an American city with one of the largest black populations in the United States (Cayton 7). During the First Migration (1910-1940) and the Second Migration (1940-1970), there was a large population of black Americans seeking refuge from the South. Most black families migrated North, settling in large metropolises with the desire to find freedom and create opportunity for themselves. During this first wave of The Great Migration, Chicago's Black population grew from 44 000 in 1910 to 234 000 in 1940 (Chatelain 3). The steady increase in population initiated the development of majority black neighborhoods, reminding us that there remained a distinct color-line in the city of Chicago. At the very center of black Chicago life was Chicago's South Side, otherwise known as "The Black Belt" (Chatelain 3). As Chatelain explains: "The Black Belt was initially a small enclave south of Chicago's downtown that grew southward from nine blocks between Twenty-Second and Thirty-Fifth Streets" (3). And while a thorough examination of the anatomy of the South Side and its black population falls outside the scope of this thesis, it must be noted that Chicago was, and continues to be, an important site for the documentation of the black experience in America. It is a city that has been shaped by black folk, who by the late 1980's, made up more than half of the region's total population (Cayton 33). As Cayton confidently states, to "understand Chicago's Black Belt [is to] understand the Black Belts of a dozen large American cities." (170).

At this point, I would like to draw our attention to previous discussions on black film culture and black representation in American commercial films. Much of 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarship that deals with representations of race in early American cinema focuses on mainstream theatrical media. As Stewart contends, this scholarship addresses issues of race with a focus on narrative films, with the more recent inclusion of documentary and avant-garde films (Ming 295).

Moreover, as Jasmyn R. Castro suggests, these inquiries have generally been concerned with the ways in which black folk have been “negatively characterized and disproportionately relegated to racially exploitative roles” (372). However, we have seen that much of black cinema’s history, as well as the black media practices and modes of production it has informed, existed outside of mainstream media circuits. As Caddoo asserts: “black film practices moved across and existed between the arenas defined by tradition and law as private and public, commercial and noncommercial, and sacred and secular (11). Recent film scholarship has accumulated a growing interest in and provided a timely intervention for the mass of black films, practices, and circuits that have been left out of dominant film histories. In their book, *Screening Race in American Nontheatrical Film* (2019), Allyson Nadia Field and Marsha Gordon examine representations and engagements with race in nontheatrical films from 20<sup>th</sup> century American cinema. The authors position nontheatrical films as central to the process of recovering and reclaiming the narratives of those most vulnerable to being, and that have previously been, overlooked and silenced by dominant, mainstream histories. Similarly, in her *Envisioning Freedom, Cinema and the Building of Modern Black Life* (2014), historian Cara Caddoo moves beyond the recurring 20<sup>th</sup> century discourse that concerns “race films,” to examine how early black film exhibition, production, and distribution practices challenged dominant American film culture and operated as alternative spaces and networks for black resistance and racial uplift.

The recent efforts made by scholars to recover and account for narratives that have long found themselves at the margins of American cinema history provides a timely reframing and renegotiation of the ways in which we have previously understood and thought of early black American film culture and the history of the black American experience it has informed. This new wave of scholarship has, over the years, influenced the emergence of new and alternative archival practices, ones which acknowledge nontheatrical films and spaces as distinct qualities,

supporting the process of foregrounding neglected histories and silenced voices. However, there is still much work to be done, as there remains a shortage of archival institutions and methodological and pedagogical guides dedicated to nontheatrical film. This especially true for black American home movies, which have frequently been overlooked from discourses on black self-representation in contemporary American cinema history, as well as from archival institutions. While a thorough exploration and critical analysis of the history of archival practices and institutions falls outside the scope of this thesis, it is important to note how archival institutions have begun to address these gaps and silences. Thus, I direct our gaze towards the varied practices and guides which have been developed and put into place to best preserve and mobilize the images and expressions of this early black American film culture.

Channeling the same exclusionary practices and qualities which have generally characterized dominant American cinema, traditional archival institutions are commonly positioned as repositories which privilege official, white, heteronormative histories and which maintain troubling relations to power and nation. However, contemporary scholarship on archival studies has generated a growing interest in more diverse epistemologies of the archive. Research groups such as York University's *Archive/Counter-Archive* have examined the changing role of the archive and have introduced new, "counter-archival" approaches to framing and activating the past. Coined "counter archives," these alternative archival frameworks have been defined and established as sites of resistance that work to disrupt traditional narratives and elevate marginalized voices ("Welcome to Archive/ CounterArchive"). The decolonial, anti-racist methodologies which are engaged by said institutions are particularly important for the restitution and remediation of materials such as black American home movies, which account for some of the earliest examples of black American self-representation, and "for which the archival record has been glaringly unequal" (Stewart, *Discovering Black Film History* 150).

Examples of counter-archives include both community and participatory archives. As its name suggests, community archives are centred on groups of people who “define *themselves* on the basis of locality, culture, faith, background, or shared identity and interest” (Flinn, *Community histories community archives* 153). They invite the active participation of their members during the process of documenting and mobilizing the history of their community “on their own terms” (Benoit III and Eveleigh 160). Indeed, the community archive has been understood as “more overt in its mission to include those fragments and perspectives that ordinarily would not be recognized as valid or worth preserving by a more conventional repository” (qtd. in Flinn, *Archival Activism*). As Andrew Flinn, reader in archival studies, explains, community archives are defined by their foundational practices but also by the contents they choose to collect and preserve. Community archives hold ephemeral material such as home movies, family photographs, diaries, and even clothing; objects which have, in the past, been overlooked by traditional archives and conceived as holding no historical or cultural merit. Meanwhile, participatory archives are defined by the “sharing of authority and control/curation between archivist and a body of users who self-identify as stakeholders in the archives content” (Benoit III and Eveleigh 15). According to authors of “Participatory Archives: Theory and Practice,” Edward Benoit III and Alexandra Eveleigh, participatory archives work to identify and foreground new and alternative perspectives on their collections through the engaged user (4). Users of the archive are included in all aspects of the institution’s archival process and practices, which include description, cataloguing, and even outreach (Benoit III and Eveleigh 4). As we have come to see, there exists much overlap between community and participatory archives. Both are self-defined and community-centred, drawing emphasis on archival practices that foreground collaborative user engagement within their respective frameworks (Benoit III and Eveleigh 159).

The methodologies applied by community and participatory archives challenge existing tensions which arise from the core archival principle of provenance. This concept serves to protect the integrity of archival materials, “dictating that records be defined and separated by their source and maintained in the ‘original order in which the records were created and kept’” (Stewart, *Discovering Black Film History* 150). For decades, archival institutions and archivists alike have “maintained ideals of impartiality,” suggesting that their care for and management over these records yield no significant effect in their transformation as archival objects (Stewart, *Discovering Black Film History* 150). However, contemporary critical literature in archival studies has considered and addressed how archivists hold considerable amounts of “social power” over such records (Stewart, *Discovering Black Film History* 150). According to Dagmar Brunow, author of *Remediating Transcultural Memory: Documentary Filmmaking as Archival Intervention* (2015), the archive operates as “an agent in its own right,” constructing “the grounds upon which history is written” through archival processes such as appraisal, curation, description, categorization, and exhibition (201). She describes these archival processes as foundational to the construction of historical sources (Brunow 201). As Stewart suggests, “the archivist’s role in creating meaning is particularly important to understand within the context of [recovering and preserving] the histories of marginalized groups” (Stewart, *Discovering Black Film History* 150). It is such that community and participatory archives’ attempts to record and preserve neglected or silenced histories through the functions of their users has proven quite successful. As will later be discussed in this chapter, by inviting users into the archive, we invite an active problematization and investigation of the archive and its conventional, exclusionary practices (Carter 225).

Now that we have discussed issues of black representation in early American film history and the recent revisionist film and archival scholarship which looks to address and reconcile these existing discourses, I draw our attention back to SSHMP. SSHMP functions as a direct

response to the 20<sup>th</sup> century American motion picture industry, its racial practices, as well its treatment and depictions of race on-screen. With a mission to “collect, preserve, digitize, exhibit, and research small-gauge home movies made by residents of Chicago’s South Side,” the archive posits the black home movie as a significant cultural and historical resource, and exposes and addresses the gaps and silences which have long been produced and perpetuated by existing archival institutions (“Our Story”). In this way, I suggest that SSHMP provides an opportune point of entry for this thesis’ exploration of why home movies are important, what they reveal, and the ways in which they have been addressed and mobilized beyond their original contexts. In what follows, I will be exploring the ways in which SSHMP has addressed, worked through, and positioned black American home movies. Minding the various archival, historical, and representational methodologies discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis, and with careful consideration of issues that arise with representations and discussions of race, I will be critically examining how SSHMP’s efforts of collecting, preserving, digitizing, and circulating home movies made by Chicago’s South Side residents have redefined our contemporary understanding of home movies and has provided “a useful guide to [a] long-undervalued body of work” (Stewart, *Giving Voice, Taking Voice* xix).

### **2.3 The South Side Home Movie Project**

SSHMP is one of the few American organizations devoted to the remediation and preservation of early black nontheatrical film. It is the *only* archive dedicated to collecting, preserving, digitizing, and mobilizing home movies from a specific local area (Ming 297). Stewart, who was born and raised in the nearby Kenwood Neighborhood, admits how her familiarity with the South Side’s rich, yet often misunderstood, history influenced the creation of the archive (Ming 295). According to SSHMP’s former Project Manager and Archivist, Candace Ming, “Stewart imagined that collecting material from [Chicago’s South Side] would produce a

rich archive and contribute directly to changing the negative narrative about these communities that persist in both national and local media” (295). As previously discussed, black Americans held very little control over the ways in which they were being represented in mainstream media. Collecting, preserving, and exhibiting these exercises of self-documentation, made by and for black folk, restores a particular sense of agency over black narratives. Indeed, in founding SSHMP, Stewart recognized the value in studying, preserving, and mobilizing home movies, positioning them “at the juncture of self-representation, individual and community engagements with moving picture technologies and the broader representational mediascape in which portrayals of African Americans and black life circulate” (Castro 373). As a one-of-a-kind project that has been most overt in its mission to collect and preserve home movies by and about black Americans, it is important to consider the ways in which the archive has had to adapt and shape its practices to better address and foreground issues of race and representation in its working model. What kind of practices, policies, or forms of outreach have they had to implement and engage to diversify the project and be more responsive to marginalization? In what follows, I will be closely examining the various stages of SSHMP’s archival process as a means to answer this question.

Before I begin to analyze SSHMP’s working model, it is useful to foreground the project’s commitment to their community. SSHMP’s archival framework draws from a long tradition of black cultural circuits which have been rooted in community-based practices. As the archive attests, “home movie donors are the heart of the project” (“Gift a Film”). Within SSHMP’s archival framework, donors are positioned as central to the project’s archival process, ensuring that upon donation, donor’s become active participants in the shaping and reshaping of their historic records. Admittedly, SSHMP describes the donation process as an exercise of forging community where donors are invited to share and participate in the life of the archive

("Gift a Film"). Alongside working with SSHMP's in house-archivist to contextualize and describe the images from the donated films, they are encouraged to participate in a range of activities offered by the project, some of which include public panels, home movie screenings, as well as collaborative public art exhibitions. Additionally, the archive offers "Family Watch Parties," where donors can schedule "a private premiere of [their] home movie collection just for family" ("Home Movie Community"). Like we have seen with HMD, this initiative and service takes into consideration that, due to inaccessibility to specialized equipment and/or lack of user knowledge and expertise, many families have not seen their movies in years, even decades. SSHMP celebrates their donors on their website's "Home Movie Community" page, where they provide the names of each of their donors. This is accompanied by a photo of the donor's choosing as well as a brief description of who the donors are and when they joined the archive. While supporting donors remains central to SSHMP's mission, the project equally invites students, locals, artists, and organizations to join the home movie community and "explore and activate the archive in imaginative ways" ("Our Story"). As Stewart explains, SSHMP encourages and values "the ongoing, symbiotic relationship between the home moviemakers, subjects, and audiences (original and current), and the advantage to activating these relationships continually" (*Giving Voice, Taking Voice* xix). Indeed, above all, SSHMP's archival framework is adapted and shaped by the responsible stewardship of their donors and users.

Like HMD, SSHMP's mission remains committed to the practice of archival strategies that address the four pillars of visibility, access, value, and care. Presently, the archive collects 8mm, Super-8 and 16mm film. These films were made as early as 1929 and as recently as 1982 ("Gift a Film"). SSHMP has developed a meticulous digitization and public access program for the home movies that are donated by South Siders. Similar to HMD's working model, the first step of this process involves inspecting the condition of the film(s), as to assure that they do not

get damaged during the transferring process (Ming 297). Reels that show advanced signs of deterioration, that have a magnetic soundtrack, or that are 16mm, cannot be digitized in-house (Ming 298). For such cases, the films are sent to SSHMP's partners at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) (Ming 298). As Ming explains, "this partnership with NMAAHC allows SSHMP to digitize a wider range of materials, and to provide local families with an opportunity to see films that are older and less accessible due to the obsolescence of proper viewing equipment" (298). Once transfers have been completed, the film reels are rewound for long-term storage in the University of Chicago's climate-controlled vault (Ming 297). The project alerts their donors that this process can take several months to be completed, however, this timeframe assures that great care and consideration is taken to best preserve their films ("Gift a Film"). Once complete, donors are provided digital copies of their films. While SSHMP offers a variety of outreach and exhibition activities, the archive encourages donors to personally share their films with family and friends as a means of mobilizing and pluralizing South Sides rich history.

To complete the film donation process, donors are asked to provide an oral history. During this final step, SSHMP works with the donor and/or their family members to document and record any autobiographical information that they can offer on their home movies. Presently, there are four recorded oral histories available for public viewing on SSHMP's digital archive. In these recordings, and during the oral histories, donors and family members work with the chronicler to describe and provide, in great detail, information about the people, places, actions, and occasions being shot. During this process, the appointed chronicler may prompt the donor(s) with questions such as "how did you know this person" or "how long did you work at this factory," for further contextualization, however, the flow and direction of the conversation is ultimately guided by the donor(s) and what they are willing to talk about and share with the

archive. As Stewart explains, “[SSHMP does] this not simply to extract information from donors and we don’t simply try to interpret them from our expert positions, rather we see this as a collaborative project in which we invite the expertise of our donors and our audiences [...] to reflect on their own histories on their own terms” (“MacArthur Fellow Jacqueline N. Stewart” 28:34-28:51). According to Ming, before being transcribed, captioned, and uploaded onto SSHMP’s digital catalogue, family members are asked to review the footage for any errors (299). This is crucial, as it ensures that donors – black Americans and South Side residents alike – remain in control of the narratives, identities, and representations that are being shaped and preserved through their respective home movies for present and future publics.

As discussed in the previous chapter, oral histories have become a principal alternative methodology and archival practice for activating and reanimating home movies beyond their original contexts and prescribed familial frameworks. As we have seen, home movies operate as visual texts where personal memory and collective history are intricately entwined. As ethnographic methodology, oral histories help to decipher and distinguish these complex categories. Thinking back to Smith’s cross-framed approach, oral histories have the unique ability to conserve and acknowledge the personal, subjective markings of home movies, yet sustain a distanced, cultural reading of their contents through the objectivity of the archive and its function. For the case of black home movies, oral histories assume a secondary, and arguably more critical, function. Coupled with the visual records provided by their associated home movies, these oral histories provide crucial insights into the 20<sup>th</sup> century black American experience. As an extension and product of the black home movie, they trace black history and black culture in the United States “within the familiar framework of an unfolding life” (Castro 383). As seen through SSHMP’s archive, these oral histories often bleed into discussions concerning identity politics, diversity, generational and cultural contrasts, and in most general

terms, what it meant and means to be a black American in the black communities of the United States. In a conversation on storytelling and oral tradition with Nathalie Joachim, Emily Hooper Lansana, and Jacqueline Stewart at the Gray Center, Stewart speaks to the importance of engaging oral histories within SSHMP's working model, she explains:

As you talk to the families and start to get the stories about how people and why people migrated to Chicago and where people worked [...] There is a pride especially for the African-American families that have donated to the Archive that they're taking in their accomplishments, precisely because this is something that counters everything that mainstream society would believe about black people. So, understanding the ways that people's work environments, their relationships to their church, their relationships to their schools, their children's schools, it really allows for the conversations that we need to have about the wide range of institutions that are structuring racism and inequality [...] but through oral histories through storytelling, when people just talk about their first days on the job or what happened in their first class or whatever it is, that broader picture comes into focus. (303)

Indeed, storytelling has been a dominant tradition and method of “generational communication and connectivity” amongst black Americans for centuries (Fabius 424). Former Librarian at Fisk University, Ann Allen Shockley, suggests that the history of black Americans is in fact “an oral history before a written one” (787). As we have seen, black Americans found solidarity and pursued resilience through alternative networks and structures of black American urban life. When traditional memory institutions failed to recognize and include the records and representations of black Americans in their collections, black folk “turned their conception of racial destiny inward” (Caddoo 17). Traditions, customs, and collective histories would be shared and handed down by elders, musicians, and pastors through songs and stories (Shockley 787). Gospel songs at black churches, children rhymes in black schoolyards, chatter on front porches; these were all methods of affirming, preserving, and mobilizing black American history through

black informal channels. It is fitting, then, that this particular black cultural practice be emulated by SSHMP as a complimentary methodology of approaching and studying black American home movies. For SSHMP, oral history operates as an important primary research tool for the recovery and reanimation of South Side history. As Stewart suggests, these oral histories are important because they work to address and reframe the black narratives which have generally been discounted by traditional archival institutions and misrepresented by mainstream 20<sup>th</sup> century American cinema.

While oral history remains a critical methodology of approaching the black home movie, Carter reminds us that it may present certain limitations for marginalized groups in particular. In his article, “Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence,” Carter examines the manifestations of silence in archives and its implications on social memory and history. Generally, these silences are exerted by the archive, through its archival activities, practices, and policies. However, Carter explains that marginalized groups may themselves choose to assert silence, as silence is not merely a form of oppression, but can be understood as “a strategy of resistance and choice” (227). This is especially relevant for black Americans, who have most recently been facing a reckoning moment with the nation’s legacy of violence against black folk. In this way, as marginalized people, black Americans may actively choose to remain silent as an assertion of political, cultural, and social power (Carter 27). Certainly, this may present as a problem for archives such as SSHMP, as oral history hinges upon the participant and/or donors’ willingness to collaborate with the archive and share their personal experiences. It should be noted that, while the author focuses most explicitly on traditional archival institutions, it is useful to consider how these archival interactions and exchanges may move into different, more informal cultural sectors that deal with preservation. This is because, regardless of the institution, marginalized groups may, consciously or not, choose to remain silent. Indeed, it is

important to recognize that there are individuals and groups that do not embrace a model like SSHMP, and who take on silence as a legitimate position. However, while silence is a valid option for members of marginalized and racialized communities, SSHMP suggests that there is also value in ethical sharing and listening. We can see this through the project's ethical approach to the complexities of historical racism. SSHMP does not compel, rather, they invite donors, who are generally members of marginalized communities, to share their stories and personal memories and to participate in the project's collaborative process and ethical framework. As Stewart affirms, during SSHMP's oral histories, "[we're] not just extracting something from somebody else [...] there is an exchange that should be taking place" (Joachim et al. 303). I suggest that, for SSHMP, the act of listening is in of itself both a radical and ethical approach to unearthing and preserving the black American experience (Joachim et al. 302).

Once the film donation process is complete, donated home movies and their associated oral histories are uploaded onto the project's digital archive. Since the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2018, SSHMP has provided public access to their collections through their online platform. Supported by the Chicago University's Humanities Computing technology services, SSHMP's cataloguing system presents a unique web-based structure which allows staff to "capture all data related to both physical and preservation properties of all holdings [and] to input and capture data, which enables end-users to search the collection by date, place, format, and subject/keywords tags" (Ming 299). Their elaborate, "high level customization" cataloguing system allows users to conveniently browse and explore their collection through a network of overlapping, multilayered South Side narratives (Ming 299). On their "The Archive" page, users may explore the archive through several featured categories and tags, such as: collection, year, format, camera technique, places, persons, organizations, sound/silent, oral histories, and subjects. Here, users can find home movies based on the year they were filmed, the format of the film, specific camera techniques,

location of where the film was shot, whether it is a silent film, and so on. The last, and arguably most detailed category, “subject,” enables users to search the archive through an alphabetized list of recurring themes and objects, which range from straightforward appearances, like “dog,” to the more abstract concepts, such as “love”. Users may also use the “keyword search” feature to find a home movie. This is most useful provided that the user knows the title of the home movie that they are searching for or its corresponding collection. Once a user has selected a home movie, they are free to stream the film. Users may also choose to follow the film through the “Featured Clips” table, where the archive provides timestamps with a corresponding description of the mis-en-scène. This feature is especially convenient for users who are looking for something or someone in specific or are looking for additional context. Once they are finished watching the film, users may continue browsing the archive through the selected home movies’ associated keywords and tags.

Recently, the archive has introduced a new, interactive “community-tagging” feature to its digital archive. The community tagging tool operates similar to a hashtag, where connections between digitized films are made by the user and through “words or short phrases that connect films by subject matter, mood, location or person” (SSHMP 0:15-0:20). Referring to participatory archival projects, Benoit III and Eveleigh explain how user-generated descriptions function as a means to complement the archivists’ expertise and “expand traditional archival description” (8). Indeed, according to the archive, the SSHMP team works with “a fixed list of terms which can’t capture all of the nuance present in these films” (SSHMP 0:53-0:56). To address these limitations, and to provide further context, users are invited to submit a tag if, upon viewing a home movie, they recognize and identify additional information about the people, places, and happenings in the film. If the home movie is especially significant to the user, and they have more to say about the film, they are encouraged to create “a memory” (“Welcome to

our Community-Tagging Event”). Here, users are invited to share “as much as [they would] like about what the films mean to [them] and/or [their] relationship to people, places, or communities featured within the film (“Welcome to our Community-Tagging Event”). Memories submitted by users can be found beneath the selected home movie and its related tags.

Researchers and scholars have indicated that community-tagging offers a variety of advantages for archives such as SSHMP, whose archival framework is most similar to those of community and participatory archives. As Benoit III and Eveleigh attest, “from the cultural, participant, economic, and social perspectives, commenting and tagging turn archives as facilitators of societal discussion and life-long learning, as well as sites for producing and negotiating individuals’ identity and purpose of life” (38). As the authors suggest, community-tagging generates a greater sense of transparency and accountability and enables users to consult, reflect, and contribute to the (re)shaping of their collective histories as equals. It has also been regarded as an instrument of “increased multivocality and diversity,” which works to address archival gaps and silences (Benoit III and Eveleigh 38). Admittedly, the tool presents many of the features that are already present in and being emulated by SSHMP’s existing archival framework and mission (Benoit III and Eveleigh 38). It is an applied practice that promotes public access to and increases public engagement with the archive and its holdings. Further, it generates a complex network of folksonomies, which can be understood as a controlled vocabulary that emerges from the collective embodied understanding of the archive’s records by its users. Community-tagging has been an especially significant addition to SSHMP’s digital platform as it has helped users navigate and work through their pasts as a means to better reflect and reanimate them in the present. Indeed, it has provided users with the opportunity to explore and interact with the digital archive in new and creative ways. As Cairns suggests, community-tagging provides “opportunities for personalised search and discovery experiences and can supply the

means to create individual [and community] narratives that more closely reflect lived experiences” (109).

However, the archival practice has, in recent years, generated some scholarly scrutiny. These concerns identify the potential limitations of community-tagging. One of the major concerns that has been discovered by researchers and scholars of the field involves the quality of user-generated tags. As Benoit III and Eveleigh explain, user-generated tags may be “idiosyncratic, imprecise, inconsistent, overlapping, duplicative, contradictory, inaccurate, non-descriptive, or erroneous” (22). Additionally, users may generate spam or malicious tags, which is a critical concern for archives like SSHMP, whose holdings are made up of a majority of culturally sensitive material (Benoit III and Eveleigh 23). It is for this reason that SSHMP has engaged ethical archival practices that look to address and mitigate the effects of these ongoing concerns. To maintain the respectful use of their collections, users must either create an account or participate in a public mediated community-tagging event to submit a tag or memory. This is done to better moderate the cultural production that is generated by and for users through exercises of collaborative transparency. Additionally, the SSHMP team must first review and approve community tag and memory submissions before they are made public. This process prevents and regulates the use of sensitive and/or compromising words or expressions and ensures that proper care is provided to the films that have been entrusted to the archive. Through these practices, SSHMP assumes their position as responsible stewards, committed to maximizing “ease of access and use,” while establishing and maintaining processes that protect “the interests of the donors, individuals, groups, and organizations whose public and private lives and activities are documented in archival holdings” (“SAA Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics”). As a recently added feature on their website, SSHMP continues to adapt community-tagging features to best suit their model and the needs of their donors and users.

The final facet of SSHMP's archival framework that I wish for us to explore is its "creative reuse" module. Since the beginning of the project, the archive has reanimated black home movies through familiar familial exhibition practices such as organized home movie screenings and "Home Movie Watch Parties" ("Creative Reuse"). However, SSHMP has equally engaged in practices that look to activate and reanimate the black home movie beyond the archive, and most importantly, beyond its original familial axis of relevance. As part of their "Creative Reuse" program, the archive actively invites students, educators, researchers, and artists to reuse home movies from their collection to transform and remediate the films into new cultural and visual formations. In doing so, the archive positions the home movie not as a personal, fixed aesthetic object, but rather, as a communal apparatus; an open text that inspires and produces a multitude of evolving translations and transfigurations.

The project explains that through creative reuse, "[they] attempt to activate the archive by creating settings in which the films can be brought into public life with intimacy and care [...] to create opportunities for new perspectives to inform how we make sense of the scenes, settings, and histories represented in the films with a contemporary lens" ("Creative Reuse"). We can see an example of such through SSHMP's very own "Spinning Home Movies" program. In 2020, when the spread of COVID-19 forced the state of Chicago to cancel and/or limit public gatherings, SSHMP initially struggled to find innovative ways to connect with their community ("Spinning Home Movies"). Built out of the desire to maintain public access to their collections and provide comfort to donors and users, the project founded "Spinning Home Movies," a program that looks to reanimate and activate silent home movies through live music ("Spinning Home Movies"). The event involves inviting local DJs into the archive to develop a 20-to-30-minute music set that is accompanied by film clips and recordings from home movies of their choosing ("Spinning Home Movies"). Each event is followed by a live discussion component,

“The Rewind,” where SSHMP members, guest artists, and users “dig deeper into the episode themes, discuss the curatorial and creative process, share the back story behind the film clips, and reflect on the unique experience of engaging South Side artists with this local film archive” (“Creative Reuse”). The program has, in the past few years, amassed a great amount of praise from the South Side community. Featured in an ABC 7 News report as well as both the Chicago Sun-Times and the Hyde Park Herald, Spinning Home Movies has become a culturally significant outreach event that has positioned South Side home movies as artistic method, community engagement, pedagogical tool, and most importantly, a practice of black self-representation.

Beyond their own programs, events, and exhibitions, SSHMP actively encourages students, artists, researchers, and scholars to reuse footage from their collections. The archive offers footage licensing and creative reuse for both commercial and non-commercial projects (“Creative Reuse”). The archive supplies home movie footage for educational and research projects as well as creative non-commercial or commercial projects (“Creative Reuse”). However, due to the “personal nature of [their] collection,” they are attentive to how their films may be handled, exhibited and/or distributed by interested parties (“Creative Reuse”). Individuals, groups, or organizations that are interested in using home movies from SSHMP’s collections are advised to contact the archive and provide details of their project. While SSHMP is committed to creating access initiatives and (re)usage opportunities for their users, due to the nature of the material that they collect, the archive “prioritizes projects that align with [their] goals,” and which complement the work that is being done by their team to foreground the experiences and histories of black Americans (“Creative Reuse”).

One such project is that of a multimedia concert performance by singer, songwriter, and poet Jamila Woods. According to a conversation between Stewart and Woods, Woods

approached SSHMP in the fall of 2018 to inquire about incorporating films from the archive's collection into her performance for her latest album "HEAVN," which "centres around Chicago, Black girlhood, identity, [and] Blackness" (Stewart and Woods 216). Woods was inspired by the images and expressions of black life in SSHMP's collections and incorporated various films from different collections in her project. As the singer explains, she was moved by the many images and sounds that she came across in the archive and later used in her performance as they reflected her experience growing up as a black woman in and around the Chicago area (216). Woods describes the home movies as possessing "a sense of magic or otherworldliness" (220). Indeed, the singer was heavily inspired by the dreamlike quality of the films. Woods and her team worked together to create a video installation which would, aesthetically and formally, reanimate the home movies into Afrotuturistic visions, expressions, and representations of black life in Chicago. In this same conversation, Stewart informs Woods about an email she received from a woman named Jaenette Foreman, whose home movies were featured in Woods sold out show. In this email to Stewart, Foreman wrote how "the video selections used in the cinematic background showing family outings, babies, parties, and other upbeat loving aspects of Black life selected from the South Side Home Movies Project was a magnificent poetic visual that explained, illuminated, and gave life to the lyrics, music, and dance about the heaven here of Black life and Culture" (Stewart and Woods 216). Indeed, as Foreman suggests in her email, these new forms of engagement with black home movies remind us how these historical images inform our contemporary understanding of what once was and what still is. As Stewart attests, these films are not merely "some kind of record of a period that is sadly gone," rather, they are complex modes of engagements, practices, multidimensional senses, and forms of community that, if we provide them the space and attention, permeate modern life (Stewart and Woods 222).

SSHMP remains a significant archival initiative that embodies much of the recent outgrowth of contemporary home movie scholarship. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the archive operates as a direct response to the 20<sup>th</sup> century American motion picture industry and its racial practices and draws from recent revisionist film scholarship, which positions nontheatrical film as central to recovering and reanimating the earliest expressions of black American film culture as well as the black American experience. Further, the project's archival framework follows the example of other participatory and/or community archives, positioning community members and users of the archive as central to their mission and engaging them throughout archival processes such as appraisal, curation, description, categorization, and exhibition. As a result, the archive offers new and creative approaches to working through home movies, with a specific commitment to centring marginalized communities, representations, and perspectives. Indeed, SSHMP's engaged archival practices, such as their film donation process, oral history interviews, online database, and outreach and access initiatives, have worked to elevate, and activate black home movies, transforming them from historical media objects into series of engagements, communal apparatuses, pedagogical tools, even artistic practices that continue to perform and operate in the present. The work being done by SSHMP has been an especially important contribution to contemporary home movie scholarship, as they remain one of the only archives in the United States dedicated to preserving and activating home movies made by black Americans.

## Conclusion:

Throughout this thesis, I have sought to uncover how, over the course of the last few decades, home movies have transformed from discreet antiquated media objects into complex film texts which operate as a series of community engagements, pedagogical tools, and cultural practices. As discussed, previously, the home movie had generally been positioned as an unchanging object which belonged in and was fixed to domestic and private settings. However, revisionist academic writing on the home movie by authors and scholars such as Patricia Zimmermann, Karen L. Ishizuka, Laura Rascaroli and Roger Odin, to name but a few, propelled a new-found appreciation for and acknowledgement of the home movie as a text which moves beyond its intended use and relevancy. These works positioned the home movie as an adaptive text and dynamic practice which could be reactivated and reanimated by contemporary shifts in archival practices, historical methodologies, and technological advancements (Rascaroli et. al 3). As we have seen, this new wave of home movie scholarship prompted the emergence of new archival institutions and cultural formations, ones which would adapt existing archival practices and introduce novel programs to address and work through home movies. In this way, my research has sought to expand upon this existing scholarship and has involved tracing the mechanisms of the home movie's transformation through said institutions and their respective archival frameworks. I have looked to my chapter 1 and chapter 2 case studies, international Home Movie Day and the South Side Home Movie Project, respectively, in hopes of answering my initial research questions: how is the home movie transformed once positioned and circulated in contexts outside of the familial space and how does this migration transform the ways in which we engage with them and they with us?

In my first chapter, I look towards HMD, a first of its kind international grassroots movement and event dedicated to the mobilization and pluralization of home movies. This

chapter begins by critically examining the various interdisciplinary approaches that have been engaged by contemporary scholars to redefine and reanimate the home movie in the present. In the second half of this chapter, I use these findings to inform my analysis of HMD's working model. Ultimately, this chapter sought to identify and examine how contemporary theories, concepts, and applications of working through home movies have been embodied by and emulated through HMD events to identify if, and in what ways, these archival practices have been reshaping our understanding of home movies' prescribed use and value. This examination is revisited and expanded in chapter two, to address the limitations of the HMD model, most specifically as it relates to matters of foregrounding race and its representation. The second chapter draws from theories and practices discussed in chapter one and investigates how SSHMP's overt prioritization of race and response to issues of marginalization have led to a productive and timely reframing and reactivation of black American home movies. To better understand the origins of SSHMP, this chapter begins by positioning and contextualizing the project in relation to the history and institutions it has been informed by. This chapter sought to critically examine the different archival practices and strategies that have been employed by the project to address, work through, and reposition black American home movies, specifically.

This thesis has shown that HMD and SSHMP share a similar mission of preserving and promoting access to home movies. These initiatives, which I establish as new cultural formations and archival models, have adapted their respective archival practices and policies to accommodate and work through the home movies' distinct aesthetic, formal, and cultural qualities. Indeed, HMD and SSHMP bare many similarities. Both projects offer public platforms for individuals and groups to find value in and engage with their own heritage and to contribute to the larger tapestry of collective memory and national history. Within their working models, HMD and SSHMP look to engage community in a shared practice of home movie appraisal,

which includes archival processes such as home movie inspection, description, and categorization. For both HMD and SSHMP, oral history functions as a principal methodology for working through and contextualizing home movies. Further, both initiatives engage in a collaborative archival process where archivists and participants work together to extract and uncover sincere and dependable forms of historical and cultural representation. Admittedly, through their respective frameworks and applied archival practices, both HMD and SSHMP have played pivotal roles for the repositioning and reanimation of home movies in the popular imaginary.

However, there remains distinct differences between the two initiatives. The first and most obvious difference is that HMD is a global movement which lends its interface and working model to international HMD hosts, while SSHMP is a more localized effort based in Chicago. Indeed, this is a significant difference; while HMD's mission is based on and responds to the specific type of archival record, SSHMP's archival framework takes into consideration and is grounded in a "shared heritage or self-identification of community" and uses home movies to embrace, uplift, and visualize such concepts (Benoit and Eveleigh 160). The second, and arguably most important difference, is each project's varying degree of commitment to and acknowledgment of diversity within their archival frameworks. As we have seen, while HMD, a global grassroots movement, has made significant contributions to the evolution and pluralization of home movies, the initiative has failed to address and/or centre historically marginalized and racialized groups within their global working model. SSHMP raises a challenge to these shortcomings, foregrounding and responding to the complexities of historical racism within their mission and throughout their archival practices and public programming initiatives. Indeed, HMD's one-size-fits-all approach to working through home movies may benefit from taking on a more proactive position as it relates to addressing and embracing diversity within its archival

framework. For SSHMP, we have seen how this prioritization has generated positive and proactive results through the project's flourishing home movie engagements, practices, and events. The third and final difference concerns the sustainable and generative reuse of home movies. While HMD supports the ongoing preservation and mobilization of home movies through archival processes such as home movie inspection, screenings as well as collaborative reflection, SSHMP takes this a step further with the introduction of their creative reuse module. This thesis has shown that, through their creative reuse initiative, SSHMP offers a valuable program that supports the home movie's continued vitality. We have seen how cases such as Wood's multi-media performance, which incorporates home movies from SSHMP's collections, have transformed these films into productive Afrofuturistic visions that highlight the historically marginalized and inform our contemporary understanding of black life in Chicago, and more broadly, the United States. Indeed, this program, which provides artists, community members, and scholars with the opportunity to reuse, rework, and reinvent home movies, make it so the histories and people in these films are kept "alive and moving forward" (Stewart and Woods 217).

I predict that, in the years to come, we will see the proliferation of localized home movie archives, projects, and initiatives working to recover and account for the many marginalized histories and narratives that have, like the home movie, been generally overlooked. Potential areas for further research may include measuring the impact that such initiatives may have on racialized communities. Focusing on the user and their experience, one may explore and assess how, and to what degree, through collaborative and community-based programs, events, screenings, and practices, home movies become forms of community empowerment and uplift and, through their evolving functions, function as mutual aid.

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