



MINING THE
EXCAVATIONS IN HISTORIES AND MEMORIES

HOME MOVIE

edited by **KAREN L. ISHIZUKA** and **PATRICIA R. ZIMMERMANN**



MINING THE HOME MOVIE

This page intentionally left blank

Mining the Home Movie

Excavations in Histories and Memories

Edited by

KAREN L. ISHIZUKA and

PATRICIA R. ZIMMERMANN



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

Berkeley Los Angeles London

25 **Reflections on the Family Home Movie as Document**

A Semio-Pragmatic Approach

ROGER ODIN

This essay uses the semio-pragmatic model I have developed over the last two decades.¹ In France, the semiological approach to cinema² was developed in the tradition of Ferdinand de Saussure on a basis of immanence: film semiology focuses on the *filmic text*. When semiology accounts for the spectator, the spectator is constructed by the film.³ When semiology investigates enunciation, it examines its traces in the text. This textual approach yielded positive results in cinema research.⁴ However, semiology completely underestimates the determining role of context in textual construction.

My semio-pragmatic model maintains the benefits of the semiological textual approach and clarifies its presuppositions. It views the construction of the text from a pragmatic perspective. The modalities of textual construction change in relation to context. Meaning is not everything: affect and the interactions during production and reception must be analyzed.

The semio-pragmatic model involves two levels. The first level concerns the *modes* of producing meaning and affect. What types of spaces will this text permit the spectator to build? Which discursive impositions will it accept? Which affective relationships are established with the spectator? Which enunciative structure will it authorize the spectator to produce? The model describes nine different modes:⁵ the spectacular mode (the film as spectacle); the fictionalizing mode (a film as the thrill of fictively recounted events); the fabulizing mode (the film's story demonstrates an intended lesson); the documentarist mode (the film informs about realities in the world); the argumentative/persuasive mode (to analyze a discourse); the artistic mode (the film as the work of an author); the energetic mode (the rhythm of images and sounds stirs the spectator); and the private mode (the film relives a past experience of the self or a group).

The second level is the *contextual*. The semio-pragmatic model emphasizes the institutional frame, pointing out the main *determinations* ruling the production of meaning and affect. When do we use the aesthetic mode? The fictional mode? The fabulizing mode? How are these modes articulated? How are they put into a hierarchy? Why do we use these modes in a particular context?

This study focuses on the documentarist mode. This mode puts at stake three processes:

1. The construction of a real enunciator (as opposed to a fictive one): an enunciator constructed as belonging to the same space as myself and to whom I am authorized to ask questions.
2. The questioning of this enunciator in terms of truth. The question, not the answer, defines the documentary mode. If the enunciator does not tell the truth, it does not imply the fictionalizing mode; on the contrary, lies, errors, and erroneous hypotheses belong with the documentarist mode.
3. The evaluation of acquired knowledge and its informational value: What have I learned about the world, people, and their relationships?

The Home Movie: A Document?

A home movie is made by one member for other members of the same family, filming events, things, people, and places linked to the family. Merilee Bennett's 1987 film, *A Song of Air*,⁶ which I will use here as a kind of film-laboratory, is a compilation film⁷ composed of home movies shot by Merilee's father, Reverend Arnold Lucas Bennett, who regularly filmed his family with a Paillard Bolex 16mm camera between 1956 and 1983. This film invites two levels of reading: first, the level of the home movies made by the father; second, the analysis made by Merilee of her father's home movies through her own reediting of the images and her omnipresent commentary in the form of a letter addressed to her father, who at the time of its writing is deceased.

To Film versus to Make a Film

In family cinema, the production of the film is not a primary goal. The filmmaker films to play with the camera and its various gadgets.⁸ He/she films for the pleasure of gathering the members of the family. *A Song of Air*

shows images of the father surrounded by his wife and children, hugging them, organizing them into a portrait-style family photo, asking them to look at the camera. To look at the camera together testifies to the unity of the familial unit. No other types of films evidence as much direct address as the home movie. The family filmmaker's camera functions first as a *go-between* and only secondly as a recording instrument.

In a film I bought at a flea market, a sequence demonstrates this function. During a somewhat uninteresting three-minute silent sequence, a familial fanfare plays out in front of a shop window with a sign that reads "R. Pallu." However, this sequence was not produced to be viewed. It is evident that during its production, the greatest pleasure was in the participants finding themselves together in front of a camera. The film produced an effect *before* its exhibition. Each family member's individual performance is spotlighted. The youngest son knocks on a large cash register and laughs; an older son blows his trumpet right in front of the camera's operator. A French horn player executes a few dance steps. To film is to take part in a *collective game* in the family domain.

However, these familial interactions are not always peaceful. In a personal letter, Merilee Bennett recounts one of these conflicts. "The shot of him [my father] talking directly into the camera with a tree and blue sky behind him was shot by me when I was 12 years old and he is actually telling me to stop, that it was enough now. I remember holding my finger on that button knowing that he couldn't get really mad at me because I would have it on film, so he had to keep smiling even though he was getting cross."

A Song of Air shows that shooting the family can have much more serious consequences. In this film, Merilee sheds the influence of her father's films, which required her to play the role of the well-behaved daughter, dispossessing her. She reclaims her identity through editing, imposing her own order on her father's films. The first and last image of the film is a shot of Merilee at the editing table. The film visualizes how the father used cinema to rule over his family: he occupies the center of the image, organizing the shooting and ordering people to perform in front of the camera. The father, "like an omnipotent God," uses cinema to mold his family. "We have to give our own life for the sake of his movies. But the important thing was to be together and feel the same way about the world."⁹ Through *A Song of Air*, Merilee rebels against both family order and the films that were its reflection and its agent. Merilee describes how she embarked on a life opposite to what her father had planned. The violence of her statement testifies to her aggressive oppression: "Out of love you tried to prevent my pain, but your safety is like suffocation. I did not tell you that I had bit a piece of a

man's tongue in a fight to stop him from raping me. Nor did I tell you that I heard the clear high song of air through the feathers of a condor. . . . When I was just ready to face you again all grown up, you died."¹⁰

Home movie productions are a festival of Oedipal relations: the person behind the camera is not just any operator but, in general, the father. In her autobiography *The Words to Say It*,¹¹ Marie Cardinal explains to her psychoanalyst that after clinical treatment she had the strength to undertake a search for the origin of her trauma. After many detours, she finally remembers her father filmed her peeing in the forest. Confused by a tapping noise, she turns around and sees her father "holding a funny black thing in front of one of his eyes, a sort of metal animal which has an eye at the end of the tube." Conscious that her urination has not only been watched, but also filmed, she felt traumatized and thought, "I want to hurt him. I want to kill him!" Shooting a home movie does not always have such dramatic consequences, but it always carries a risk for the subjects filmed, especially children. Parents are not aware of the psychic consequences of a seemingly harmless act.

Even before existing as a film, the family film has already produced collective and individual effects. What happens during shooting is often more important than the film itself. Indeed, the family filmmaker does not always develop the film. In *Sur la plage de Belfast* (On the Beach at Belfast, France, 1996), Henri-François Imbert recounts his discovery of an 8mm camera with an undeveloped reel inside. After a long search, he found the family to whom this camera belonged. The director of the movie had died. The mother remembered her husband regularly making films that he rarely developed. This practice is not exceptional at all.

To Film versus to Do Cinema

Merilee's father's movies are fearful precisely because they are well made. The images are shot on a tripod, well framed, and carefully directed. Sometimes, the father would even make his family act out little scenarios. Merilee notes that "all had the theme of a family alone facing an outside threat."¹² Form strictly corresponds to the content. Images are regulated, policed and policing. These images represent the family moral order that the Methodist father mandates.

In *A Song of Air*, Merilee radically deconstructs and appropriates her father's films. She destroys her father's storylines and reedits the images to illustrate the letter she reads to her father in voiceover. She attacks the images' materiality, breaking them up and manipulating them (as Godard does

in some films) to bestow specific symbolic meaning. For example, a shot of the father lifting his eyes to the sky is shown three times. First, it symbolizes the trust in God that the father communicates (“united, we can laugh at the ghosts, at the dark corner of life, at pain, even at death”). Second, when Merilee discusses her father’s death, the shot appears as flashback. Third, when Merilee explains her life to her father, who claims misfortune, the shot illustrates discontent. Another shot assumes a symbolic force as an undoing-in-motion. One of Merilee’s brothers, hatchet in hand, chops a block of wood whose form evokes a head. The father’s long hands order the hatchet be handed over. Her brother smashes the head into many pieces—a startlingly violent effect. The beautiful and remarkable waterfall sequence (a succession of pauses visualizes the trickle of falling water) shows the young girl’s will to escape the force that submerges her. Merilee swims underwater in a movement abruptly stopped. Merilee adds her own image, a close-up screaming toward the sky in contrast to the direction of her father. In her personal letter referenced above, Merilee explains she used video to oppose her father’s overpolished images: a dirty image.

At the end of this filming process, Merilee will be able to say, “I love you” to her deceased father. Family movies that are too “well made” exert violence on the family. Only another violence might break off the process: the violence that comes with artistic reprocessing, as exemplified in *A Song of Air*.

Documentarist Readings versus Private Reading Practices

In the home movie, those addressed by the film have lived the events depicted. Reading a home movie does not summon the documentarist mode of reading but the *private one*. If I construct a real enunciator (the Family), I do not ask the truth question nor expect information. Home movie images function less as representations than as *index* inviting the family to *return to a past already lived*. The home movie does not communicate. Instead, it invites us to use a double process of *remembering*.

Collective remembering. Unlike fictional film screenings, interaction infuses the projection of a family film. Each family member reconstitutes a common past. A viewer might intervene to stop the screening (behavior prohibited while watching a fictional film) to develop the memory of an important scene. The story is certainly triggered by the screen, but it does not necessarily relate to the images. Unlike traditional cinematographic projection, to watch a home movie is to be involved in a “performance.” The home

movie resembles “expanded cinema”:¹³ what transpires at the time of the showing forms an integral part of the text. To watch a home movie with the family is to collaborate in the reconstruction of a (mythical) family history. Remembering builds toward *celebration*. Merilee Bennett’s father clearly understood the home movie’s ideological role: Merilee explains that “almost every Sunday evening, after tea, we watched movies, we saw ourselves growing up.”

Individual remembering. The story of the individual parallels the collective story. Boris Eikhenbaum proposed the notion of “interior language”: “The process of interior discourse resides in the mind of the spectator.”¹⁴ This interior language can be understood without referring to a context because it is located in the Subject. With the home movie, the context resides in the experience of the Subject. Consequently, home movies seem boring for those outside the family because outsiders lack the contextual frame that positions the disjointed images. This model also explains how completely banal images can refer to representations far removed from what is represented. Contrary to the generally euphoric collective experience, this process of returning to the self often conjures painful memories. Merilee is driven to remember she had once dreamed of poisoning her father and ruminates on how leaving his house to live her life caused his death.

In *Muriel* (France, 1963), Alain Resnais demonstrates this internal functioning of the family film. Bernard shows the elder Jean images taken during his Algerian military service. Scenes from the life of Algerian military camp life during the war are rendered with the fuzzy, shaky, and overexposed visual rhetoric of the family film. This film, however, bears no resemblance to a document: it teaches nothing about Algeria, the Algerian War, or soldiers. Its importance is elsewhere. In response to the question posed by his girlfriend, Marie, who queries, “Is this a documentary?” Bernard unhesitatingly replies, “Worse.” This film evokes a terrible and unforgettable scene: the torture session he and other soldiers forced Muriel to endure. The film does not show any torture images, but Bernard describes the event that changed his life in detail: “There were five of us around her. . . . We were discussing that she had to talk before nightfall. . . . Robert lights a cigarette. . . . He comes close to her. . . . She screams.”

Jerky, broken, the voice is monotonous, neutral, and expressionless, like a sleepwalker who speaks. Alain Resnais demands we assume Bernard’s drama. By showing banal images, he privileges Bernard’s oral story, pushing us to fantasize the scenes he describes. The story of Muriel’s torture involves us; we produce the images. It is our film. With several minutes of bad-quality images, this fragment serves as a moment of torture for the spectator, operating as

what I call a “mise-en-phase,”¹⁵ simultaneous with the story of Muriel’s torture and with the torture that memory of this session enacts in Bernard.

In the family domain, a home movie does not function as documentation. The family film is, in fact, a *counter-document*. The collective interactions at the moment of their shooting or viewing or in the individual interior discourses aroused are more important than the images. To read a home movie as a document is to “use”¹⁶ it for something that is not its own function.

Reading the Home Movie as a Document

Reading a home movie as a document, I employ the three processes of the documentarist mode.¹⁷ What are the specific problems raised by the home movie as a document? What does using the home movie as a document—as opposed to other existing documentary resources, such as professional televised reports—bring to documentary production? The difficulties encountered in the usage of home movies as a document are the most interesting points of analysis.

The first difficulty emerges from the stereotypical character of the home movie. Nothing resembles a home movie as much as another one. The home movie perpetuates and reinforces a familialist ideology that subjects it to various pressures. Pierre Bourdieu, discussing family photography, argued that nothing can be filmed outside of what *must* be filmed.¹⁸ The same ritual ceremonies (marriage, birth, family meals, gift-giving), the same daily scenes (a baby in his mother’s arms, a baby having a bath), the same vacation sequences (playtime on the beach, walks in the forest) appear across most home movies. With such repetitions, discouragement and lassitude sometimes overtake spectators, weakening informational value.

Looking at home movies differently, these stereotypes also constitute a remarkable trump card, attesting to their formidable *representability*.¹⁹ As a specimen from an entire ensemble of images, a home movie image possesses an extraordinary force. Each image condenses and *crystallizes* thousands of analog images. No news reports hold such psychic force. Discussing “common things,” Georges Perec contended the difficulty is “to free these images from the straitjacket in which they are trapped, to make them produce meaning and speak about what they are and what we are.”²⁰ Home movies are precisely “common things.”

Frequently, commentary imbues images with meaning. The result depends on the writer’s skill. The storyteller of *La vie filmée* (1975), a series of films done for television from amateur films, enchants us,²¹ but not everyone is

Georges Perec. Another strategy consists of serialization. In *Les vacances à la mer de 1840 à nos jours*²² (Belgium, 1986), another series, various representations confront the same theme across different periods, from aristocratic vacations to the advent of mass tourism, through the war years, illuminating the differences between the stereotypes of each period. Lastly, another route consists in cultivating what Erving Goffman terms the process of “shifting of frame.”²³ A film of minor importance can suddenly become a fabulous document when the historical context of reading changes. André Huet recounts how stock travel films shot in the former Yugoslavia, initially considered insignificant, suddenly accrued more importance after the war. Every old home movie that operates within a different spatial, cultural, ethnic, or social framework will benefit from de-framed readings. Even if these images were not documents and were stereotypical home movies, they become precious because they look new. Shifting from the familial to the cultural frame, Merilee’s father’s films reveal themselves to be less stereotypical. Methodist family characteristics emerge: the number of children, the force of religion, the written rules, the frugality of meals, the insistence on outdoor games.

The second difficulty resides in the familial institution’s prohibitions and impositions on representation. The home movie refuses to represent anything shocking and embarrassing (the intimate), to reveal a pessimistic view of family life (illness, suffering, misery), or too threatening to the image of the ideal family (household scenes, parent-child conflicts, familial dramas). The home movie constructs a euphoric vision of family life. No other genres of cinema consist of so much laughter and so many smiles.²⁴ If the truth question is posed, these images are deceptive. Merilee’s family is not the happy family documented in her father’s films. Instead of providing information about society, home movies function as filters masking reality. Patrick Jeudy constructed his film *Les yeux d’Eva Braun* (France, 1991) on this opposition. The film parallels Hitler’s typical home movies presenting happy, charming images with the terrifying reality of archival documents of the Third Reich. Hitler smiles, surrounded by two babies. Eva kisses a small rabbit. Hitler, seated in an armchair, strokes Eva’s hair. Hitler strolls with Eva’s sisters along the Koningsee. Eva does gymnastics. She wears a Bavarian costume on the terrace of Berghof. Hitler walks, cane in hand, reminiscent of “Charlot” (the affectionate French name for Charlie Chaplin). Home movies are deceptive documentaries (“*documenteurs*,” to quote the title of one of Agnès Varda’s films).

One can turn Jeudy’s film demonstration upside down: Eva’s home movies show that Hitler was a man like us. This discovery is more informational and perhaps more frightening than the images of war. It is possible

to assert the documentary specificity of the home movie and its contribution to the informational level as opposed to the framework of professional reporting, which is as incomplete and deceptive as the home movie. On the one hand, a report documents historical upheavals, social conflicts, political rivalries, the scandalous, minor bedroom happenings of stars and politicians, foul or passionate crime—everything excised from the home movie. On the other hand, it tells us nothing about what Georges Perec has described as what happens when nothing happens, “everyday happenings, that which comes back every day, the banal, the daily, the obvious, the ordinary, the background noise, the habitual.” In another passage of the same article, Perec adds: “The news covers everything except the everyday humdrum of our lives” and begins to dream about an endotic anthropology (versus “exotic”).²⁵ Family filmmakers are involuntary endotic anthropologists: they film those moments of life that professionals ignore. Official reports fail to document entire aspects of society. Home movies are sometimes the only records of some racial, ethnic, cultural, social communities marginalized by the official version of history. Even if these films do not recount the entire history and often show what the community sanctions, these films represent important documents. As Karen L. Ishizuka insists, “Within home movies . . . lie hidden histories of the world.”²⁶

The third difficulty is the absence of background on some of these films. Confronting a home movie found at the flea market, I undertake a superficial reading of only the image. This limitation precludes an understanding of particular shots and actions (for example, I am unable to know the status of two men who hold a woman by the waist), but this lack of background information can also have positive consequences. Unconstrained by demands of a familial reading that positions the construction of the family as a real enunciator, I can construct other enunciators. These different reading areas offer “specifications”²⁷ of the exemplary value of the images.

I can, for example, assume the camera as a real enunciator. In this perspective, everything placed in front of the camera becomes a possible object for a reading. I can focus on things that are not the topic of the shot itself: the habitat in the decor, the cars on the street, the outfits worn by the characters, the details of their haircuts, the secondary actions in the corner of an image. I can also position the cameraman as enunciator and observe that he shoots better than most family cameramen. The film then becomes a documentary on the filmmaker. Lastly, I can take the film text itself as a real enunciator. The image is beautiful and well focused, the colors have stood the test of time, but there is a stripe down the center, a sign the film was made in the 9.5mm format with a center frame perforation. The film, then,

documents technological evolution. The documentarist reading expands into a *palimpsest* of readings.²⁸

One might wonder if photography isn't a more appropriate object of study for this type of multilayered reading than cinema. Because of its constantly moving images, cinema does not lend itself to a detailed analysis of each image. Films that allow such a reading, as *La vie filmée*, freeze the images to focus on a background element, or reduplicate the same sequence to enable different readings.

The fourth difficulty is linked to the particular emotional relation that home movie images weave with their spectator: an ordinary man like myself filmed them, thus these images are a little like me and they speak to me of people like me. The result is that when I see a document that I know to be excerpted from a home movie, I have a tendency not to ask the truth question, which characterizes the documentarist mode of reading. Reading in terms of authenticity perverts the documentarist mode of reading: it rests on the construction of a real enunciator, yet it prevents one from questioning it, impeding a critical reading and a true historical approach.²⁹ At the same time, it is evident that this emotional relation is what gives home movie images their specific power. Their ability to seduce and to attract creates a magic that radically distinguishes home movies from news-reported images and from traditional documentaries.

Magic against Truth

It is interesting to point out some of the various strategies adopted by directors to face these contradictions.

The first solution consists of ignoring the problem in using the authenticity effect in a matter-of-fact way, a typical television strategy. If television explicitly indicates the provenance of these documents in the commentary or in a subtitle ("amateur images"), it is not only to excuse their poor quality in comparison to other televisual images but, mostly, to recuperate the emotional effect for profit.

A second solution—radically opposite of the first—reinforces the discourse of the historian: the images follow the voiceover that delivers the historical discourse. The beginning of the fourth part of *La guerre filmée au quotidien*, "The Vision of the Soldier" (Germany, 1995), a documentary by Michael Kubal,³⁰ functions according to this construction: images from several amateur films are reedited to create a continuous narrative illustrating the commentary. Using the voice of the master, we are in what Bill Nichols

calls the “expository mode.”³¹ The enunciator of the film is not constituted by the authors of the images (the amateur filmmakers), but by the one in charge of the discourse (the historian). Such a treatment certainly allows us to perform a documentarist reading (to ask the truth question), but results in the effacement of the home movie’s affective power by reducing its function to documentation.

A third solution consists in telling a story and doing everything to ensure believability. An excellent example of this treatment is *Le rêve de Gabriel* (Belgium, 1996) by Anne Lévy-Morelle. The film recounts the story of an engineer from Brussels, Gabriel de Halleux, who one day decides to leave for Patagonia with his wife and nine children to exploit a territory offered by the Chilean government. The film reedits numerous reels of 9.5mm and 8mm film shot by the engineer. Interviews and landscape shots are added later. The story is unquestionably captivating, but its force leads to the loss of specificity of home movies and to the flattening of historical discourse. The cinematographic work (montage, sound, music, mise-en-phase) pushes toward a fictionalizing reading. In place of a real enunciator, we construct a fictive one: we watch the film without asking any questions, stirred by the rhythm of the narrated events.

A fourth solution would give voice to those who took images and/or to the participants of the filmed event. The program *Inédits*, created by André Huet for Belgian TV R.T.B.F. (1980), made its mark with this sort of treatment. *Inédits* is the first daily program entirely done from amateur films. But this formula is not without some negative consequences: it encourages one to retain only scraps of history and to insist on picturesque or anecdotal events. For example, in one of the broadcasts two brothers comment on a film, discussing the evolution of a revolutionary motorcycle that they built at Châtelet in 1925. In another example, in a suitcase sold at an auction or at a flea market in Brussels, an amateur discovers photos of two acrobats who worked for the famous Barnum and Bailey circus. In 1967, a truck transporting 10,400 gallons of gas explodes in the heart of Martelange, setting an entire neighborhood on fire. What the discussants say is often very disappointing: they simply describe the images or vaguely situate them in their context, while others share their impressions or talk about their lives. However, on some occasions the narrative can be moving and even poignant, but in this case, the result is to fall directly back into the schema of authenticity.

The most interesting films are produced by directors who understand that the most productive strategy is to wrestle with the contradictions of the family-movie-as-document. The series *La vie filmée* chose to articulate

syntagmatically all the readings and modes of reference that a home movie allows: historical, fictional, private readings, testimonies, nostalgia, moments of pure emotion. Other riskier readings have focused on placing the contradiction in the center of the film, banking on the aesthetic force of the images. Hungarian filmmaker Péter Forgács undertakes this position in *Wittgenstein Tractatus* (1998). Closer to experimental cinema than to the document, this film constitutes a masterful reflection on the notion of the document itself: why one makes films; the language of the images and language itself; and the possibilities that the image holds for cognition.³²

Conclusion

The amateur film movement is often associated with democracy: "One thing is certain," notes Peter MacNamara in an issue of *Journal of Film Preservation* devoted to the amateur film, "amateur films are wonderful documents for a democratic history."³³ Circulating home movies is "to fight for the sharing of experiences and knowledge that have been drawn from all areas concerning traces of collective memory."³⁴ These writers argue amateur films give voice to the politically, ethnically, and socially excluded, revive the productive capacities swallowed up by globalization and consumerism, and restore creativity and freedom. In short, they contribute to "remaking the world."³⁵ Although I would like to share these euphoric positions, I advance a somewhat different discourse. I wonder why this kind of film is in fashion today? What is this fashion symptomatic of? What does it hide or stand in for?

First, this interest in amateur film obviously derives from the logic of media economy and increases the risk of exploiting amateurs. The Association Inédits is the only institution truly concerned with this question: it produced a "charte des inédits" (charter for the amateur productions).³⁶ Unfortunately, such a charter does not resolve every problem. First, amateurs are eager to be exploited to see their work on television. Second, even if the amateur is properly remunerated, amateur production is cheaper than professional production for a television channel. Third, the turn to the amateur resolves all problems of flexible crews. It is no longer necessary to send a team to an event because hundreds of amateurs will spontaneously rush there. Finally, because the quality of amateur productions has significantly improved, the route to television no longer entails as many technical problems. One can conjecture that television channels will utilize more and more

of these productions. An entire sector of the profession will be threatened. Mass use of amateur productions on European television appears to be an important agent of deregulation.

Secondly, it is not an accident that film archives specializing in amateur productions appear in regions where the question of identity seemed urgent: Brittany, Belgium, Holland, Wales, border regions. Family productions are deployed for a local or identity claim context. The rising interest in amateur productions is one symptom of micromovements fighting for identity and the dissolution of a structured public space. Although these movements can be read as a reaction against globalization, there exists a dangerous corollary in the rise of tribal identifications and mobilizations.

Finally, the use of family films as documents, testimonies, and first-person productions is especially troubling. These productions empty out the truth question, which benefits authenticity and affective emotion. This movement constitutes a massive exploitation of productions in what Umberto Eco called "neo-television" or what Dominique Mehl calls "television of intimacy."³⁷ This movement has trickled down to movie houses where first-person productions are increasingly shown; for example, *Intime* (Italy, 1996) and *Aprile* (Italy, 1998) by Nanni Moretti, *La Rencontre* (France, 1997) by Alain Cavalier, *Omelette* (1998) by Remy Lange, or *Demain et encore demain* (1998) by Dominique Cabrera. Increasingly, fictional films also function in this mode: pseudo-confessions, such as *Blackout* (United States/Italy, 1997) by Abel Ferrara; pseudo-news programs, such as *The Blair Witch Project*; productions by Dogma. "Whatever has happened, that's what we see," notes the director of *Festen* (Denmark, 1998), Thomas Vinterberg, who claims a surveillance-video aesthetic.³⁸ On the Web, with its incredible outpouring of the intimate displayed in myriad forms, this phenomenon is even more evident.

This wave of amateur productions participates in a larger social context strengthening individualism. As Renaud Dulong wrote: testimony does not subject a mind to a statement but an individual to another individual.³⁹ It also propels the emergence of the uncivil man (Richard Sennett), the weakening of public institutions (Jürgen Habermas), the masking of conflicts by affect, and the replacement of communication by communion or fusion.⁴⁰

Relations between democracy and amateur documents are neither always simple nor always positive. We must resist mystifying these productions as much as we formerly scorned them. We must realize not only their public usage, but also their economic, social, and ideological influence. In every case, the stakes are high.

Notes

The essay was translated by Grace An.

1. The first article that I explicitly devoted to this approach was "Pour une sémio-pragmatique du cinéma," *Iris* 1, no. 1 (1983): 67–82, translated in *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Stam and Toby Miller (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 54–67. To follow the development of this model, read my "Sémio-pragmatique du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel: modes et institutions," *Toward a Pragmatics of the Audiovisual* (Münster: NODUS, 1994), 33–47; and my *De la fiction* (Brussels: De Boeck, 2000).

2. For a systematic presentation of this approach, see Roger Odin, *Cinéma et production de sens* (Paris: A. Colin, 1990).

3. For an approach in this perspective, see Daniel Dayan, *Western Graffiti: Jeux d'images et programmation du spectateur dans la chevauchée fantastique de John Ford* (Paris: Clancier-Guenaud, 1983); and Francesco Casetti, *Dentro lo sguardo: il filme il suo spettatore* (Milan: Bompiani, 1986). Regarding enunciation, see J. P. Simon and M. Vernet, eds., "Enonciation et cinéma," *Communications* 38 (1983).

4. Christian Metz claims this approach in his *L'énonciation impersonnelle ou le site du film* (Paris: Méridiens-Klincksieck, 1991). For Raymond Bellour, this new attention to the filmic text is the essential contribution of semiology to film studies: *The Analysis of Film*, ed. Constance Penley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

5. I characterize them from the reader's perspective, but this characterization also applies to the space of direction; one would just have to replace "seeing" with "directing" and modify the necessary details that are indispensable to the definition.

6. Merilee Bennett was born in Brisbane in 1957. She was trained in photography and cinema at the Philip Institute of Technology. *A Song of Air* (1987) was shot in 16mm. Production: Jane Karlake, with a grant from the Women's Film Fund and from the Australian Film Commission. Script and editing: Merilee Bennett. Photography: Maria Rita Barbagallo. Music: Douglas Knehans. Sound: Duncan Smith.

7. Jay Leda, *Films Beget Films: A Study of the Compilation Film* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1971).

8. In "Experience of an Amateur Filmmaker," Norman MacLaren explains the pleasure he had in being promoted from his ordinary Ciné Kodak camera to the Special Kodak camera: "It was as playing on an electric organ after fooling on a tin whistle; . . . our first impulse was to press all the stops and use all the gadgets. I was so enamored with the possibilities of the Ciné Kodak Special that I designed a film specially to exploit all the possibilities of such a camera." *Journal of Film Preservation* 25, no. 53 (1996): 33.

9. I quote the film commentary.

10. It was this sentence that provided the film with its title. In a personal letter, Merilee explains this title:

When I was 20 years old I went to Peru and on my 21st birthday, I was camping with friends high in the Andes and as we set up our little tent a condor

flew down to have a look at us. It hovered above us for a long time, this huge bird, wing span of around 6 feet across and the tips of the wings were open like fingers and it was so close I could hear the sound of air through those wing tips. It was a flutelike sound, a song of air. It was one of those moments in life when I felt blessed. It was the most exquisite surprise for my birthday. It became a personal emblem of life's ecstasy. I had a lot of trouble trying to work out how to name the film. I read through the script and that phrase "song of air" jumped out at me, so to speak. It felt right also because I was making a film that was in a sense a love letter, a love song to my father and he was dead so I was speaking to the air.

11. Marie Cardinal, *The Words to Say It*, trans. Pat Goodheart (Cambridge, MA: Van Vactor and Goodheart, 1983), 152.

12. Here is the summary of one of these scenarios as communicated by Merilee in a personal letter. The scenario is titled "Family Ghost": "It's the story of a family, at home, hearing a strange sound one night when father is away. My sister lies down for a rest and has a dream where she sees an ancestor killing someone; she wakes up in fright as if the sound is coming from the ghost of this murdered butler; the family rush in when they hear her screams. Outside in the light of the moon they see it: the Ghost. Next shot a possum (small friendly marsupial)."

13. The term "expanded cinema" designates a trend in experimental cinema that plays on the transformation of conditions around traditional projections of film, especially in regard to the involvement of spectators themselves in the show. Expanded cinema is one aspect of "performance art." On this kind of cinema, see G. Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (London: Studio Vista, 1970); D. Noguez, *Éloge du cinéma expérimental* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1979); and *Une renaissance du cinéma: le cinéma underground américain* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1985).

14. Boris Eikhenbaum, "Problemes de ciné-stylistique," *Cahiers du cinéma* 220–221 (May–June 1970): 70–78, trans. Sylvianne Mossé and André Robel. This question of interior language was taken up again by Emilio Garroni in *Progetto di semiotica. Messaggi artistici et linguaggi non-verbali. Problemi teorici e applicativi* (Bari: Editoria Laterza, 1972).

15. For a definition of my notion of "mise-en-phase," see *Film and Theory*, ed. Robert Stam and Toby Miller: "By mise-en-phase, we mean the following: at every major stage in the story being told, the film produces a relationship between itself and the spectator (an affective positioning of the latter) which is homologous with the relationships occurring in the diegesis" (60); and Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000): "Mise en phase (literally the 'placing-in-phase' or 'phasing in' of the spectator), the operation which enlists all the filmic instances in the service of the narration, mobilizing the rhythmic and musical work, the play of looks and framing, to make the spectator vibrate to the rhythm of the filmic events" (255). See also R. Odin, "Mise en phase, déphasage et performativité dans *Le Tempestaire* de Jean Epstein," *Communications* 38 (1983): 213–38, and chapter 3 in my book *De la fiction*.

16. Here I am borrowing Umberto Eco's distinction between "to use" and "to interpret" a text. See *The Limits of Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

17. It is to be noted that all films (even fictional films) may be read as documents.

18. P. Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 31–36.

19. On this notion, see Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), chapter 3.

20. Georges Perec, "Approche de quoi," in *Le pourrissement des sociétés*, 10/18 (Paris: UGE, 1975), 251–55.

21. The series was directed by Jean Pierre Alessandri and Jean Baronnet and narrated by Georges Perec, 1975.

22. A series directed by André Huet, Inédits series, 1986.

23. On this notion, see Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

24. See my article "Rire et film de famille," in *Le genre comique*, R. Rolot and F. Ramirez, eds. (Montpellier: Centre d'Étude du XX siècle, Université Paul Valéry, 1997), 133–52.

25. Perec, "Approche de quoi."

26. Karen L. Ishizuka, "The Home Movie: A Veil of Poetry," in *Jubilee Book: Essays on Amateur Film* (collective publication, Association Européenne Inédits) (1977): 45–50.

27. See Goodman, *Languages of Art*, chapter 3.

28. See my article "Lecture documentarisante, film documentaire," *Cinéma et Réalités* (St. Etienne: C.I.E.R.E.C., Université de Saint-Etienne, 1984), 263–78; and my *De la fiction*, chapter 12.

29. I borrow this distinction from Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973).

30. Michael Kubal is also the author of *Familien Kino, Geschichte des Amateurfilms in Deutschland*, 2 vols. (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowolt, 1980).

31. Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 34–38.

32. On this theme, other than Gilles Deleuze, one can consult Jacques Aumont, *A quoi pensent les films* (Paris: Séguier, 1996).

33. Peter MacNamara, "Amateur Film as Historical Record: A Democratic History?" *Journal of Film Preservation*, no. 25 (1996): 53.

34. André Huet, "Approche de l'univers des Inédits," *Jubilee Book: Essays on Amateur Film* (collective publication, Association Européenne Inédits) (1977): 28.

35. Patricia R. Zimmermann, "Cinéma amateur et démocratie," *Communications* 68 (1999): 281–92.

36. Suzanne Capau, "L'inédit et le droit: Ébauche d'un contrat," *Jubilee Book: Essays on Amateur Film* (collective publication, Association Européenne Inédits) (1977): 117–22.

37. Umberto Eco, "TV: La transparence perdue," in *La Guerre du faux* (Paris:

Livre de Poche, 1988), 196–220 (the article was originally written in 1983). On this notion, also see Francesco Casetti and Roger Odin, “De la paléo- à la néo-télévision. Approche sémio-pragmatique,” *Communications* 51, “Télévisions/mutations” (1990): 9–26. Dominique Mehl, *La télévision de l'intimité* (Paris: Seuil, 1996).

38. Interview with Thomas Vinterberg, *Repérages* 4 (winter 1998–99): 13.

39. Renaud Dulong, *Le Témoin occupaire* (Paris: EHESS, 1998), 160.

40. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1974); Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Berlin: Neuwied/Rhin, 1962); Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities, or The End of the Social and Other Essays*. trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and John Johnston (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983).