FILM THEORY IN MEDIA HISTORY

SPACES OF COMMUNICATION

ELEMENTS OF SEMIO-PRAGMATICS

ROGER ODIN

Amsterdam
University
Press

Spaces of Communication

Film Theory in Media History

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Elements of Semio-Pragmatics

Roger Odin

With an Introduction by
Vinzenz Hediger

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A Democracy of Readings and Objects: Roger Odin's Contribution to the Theory of Film

Vinzenz Hediger

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5. The Space of Communication and Migration: The Example of the Home Movie

Abstract
Chapter 5 puts into action the notion of a space of communication to create understanding around what a production becomes when it moves outside its original space.

Keywords: home movie, archives, television, history, art, medical context

In the preceding chapter I showed how analysis in terms of a space of communication made it possible to describe how productions belonging to the same axis of relevance worked in a given context, and how it could take account of the transformation of this context throughout history. The present chapter looks at how this same concept can help explain what becomes of a production when it *migrates outside its original context.* To address this issue (and in keeping with the previous chapter), I will take the example of family audiovisual productions – and more precisely, of the home movie. And indeed, the home movie goes through a remarkable phenomenon of migration through a whole range of diverse contexts. It is a matter here of studying, not these contexts in and of themselves, but only what they do to the home movies that come into their midst. There can be no question, either, of analysing all the contexts into which these productions migrate. I will simply offer a few examples that I have chosen because of the variety they represent and the methodological interest they hold for us.

The Home Movie: From Archives to Loci of Memory

The most notable manifestation of the migration of family audiovisual productions outside their home institution is most certainly the creation,

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around the world, of archives that either are specialized in these productions or that at least have a fund specifically dedicated to them: The Cinémathèque of Brittany, the Video Library of the City of Paris, the Library of Saint-Étienne, the Andalusian Cinémathèque, the Cinémathèque Basque, the Museum of Ethnography of Goms (Switzerland), the North West Film Archive (Manchester), the Scottish Film Council (Glasgow), the Small Film Museum (the Netherlands), the New Zealand Film Archive, the Austrian Film Museum (Vienna), the Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center (Cambodia), the National Board of Antiquities for Prints and Photographs (Finland), the Living Picture Archive (Viborg, part of the Museum Salling Complex, Denmark), the Human Studies Film Archives (Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC), and so on.

It is their value as documents that justifies the migration of home movies to these archives. Read in the *documentarizing mode*, they do indeed impart valuable information on whole sectors of society that are not documented by official authorities or in professional reports. In particular, they are second to none when it comes to documenting what happens when nothing happens: "the banal, the everyday, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the usual." Georges Perec, from whom I have borrowed this listing, notes: "The newspapers talk about everything except the everyday." And he wonders: "What is really happening – what we live through, the rest, all the rest: where is it?" He then starts musing about an "endotic" (as opposed to an "exotic") anthropology.[1] Makers of home movies are, in their own way, involuntary endotic anthropologists. Without thinking about making this or that document, they film these moments of life that professionals do not film (because they do not come from the communication space in which they operate).

But we cannot stop there. Most of the institutions that collect these films are *regional* archives or cinémathèques and are thus subject to specific constraints: in particular, they are involved in the identity problems of the region in question. At more or less ritualized screenings, people meet up to share a story and make clear their belonging to the same community. The production of meaning and affects is then related to the memory of the group. We are no longer in documentarizing but in *private mode*. The relational dimension of communication outweighs, then, the production of meaning. The archives are transformed into "*loci* of memory."[2] The main reason that those who deposit films give for doing so is, moreover, that they want to be part of the region's memory.

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[1] Georges Perec, "Approche de quoi," *Le pourrissement des sociétés*, Paris: 10/18 (1975), pp. 251–255.

[2] Pierre Nora, "Entre mémoire et histoire. La problématique des lieux," *Les lieux de mémoire*, I. *The Republic* (1984), Paris: Gallimard, pp. xvii – xlii.

The choice between the documentarizing and the private modes depends for the most part on the status of the actant who is interested in these movies. Whereas the inhabitants of a given region enter an archive as members of a community (using the *private mode*), researchers (historians, sociologists, ethnologists, anthropologists, and the merely curious) use documentarizing mode first and foremost: for them it is the truth that is essential. Of course, the same individual may straddle both actantial roles.

Different operators are deployed in accordance with whether the production of meaning is in accordance with one or the other mode. When the private mode predominates, we find the same type of operator as in the family, but at the level of a larger community such as a city or a region: films serve as *stimulators* of memory and relationships. What is important is less what they show or say, and more the work of memory they generate and the link that they create (or reinforce) between or among the receivers. Conversely, when it is the documentarizing mode that predominates, these same films are approached, rather, as *vehicles* of information, and these *operators* have an utterly different status: they are tools that make it possible to reconstruct the past in a (more or less) systematic, reasoned, distanced way (which memory does not do). They are *analyst-operators*.

Here are some examples of analyst-operators.

Surface analysis: here the focus is on things the film shows but that are not the subject of the shots: the landscape, the milieu, shopfronts, signs in shops, cars passing in the street, what the characters are wearing, activities going on in the background (the police officer on traffic duty, the street sweeper, the person hawking the morning paper), and so on.

Serialization: comparing representations of the same theme (the status of women, holidays, marriage) in films from different periods and cultures makes it possible to highlight differences and make interpretation productive.

Enunciative analysis: this has to do with the point of view from which films show the world: how do settlers film Africa and Africans? Is there a male way of filming? Does a Protestant make the same home movies as a Catholic?

Contextualization: what is represented can remain opaque, or at least not deliver all of its meaning, if it is not put into context. You must then request information from the author of the images, and set the film in its historical and social context. In a word, you must leave the film, all the better to come back and understand it more fully.

The change of "framework":[3] a film can become important because the historical framework in which it is interpreted has changed. Thus, André Huet, the founder of the INEDITS European Association ("amateur films/memory of Europe") which since 1991 has been bringing together all those – archivists, directors, researchers – who are interested in the home movie as a document, tells how travel films that had been shot in Yugoslavia and that he had stored even though he considered them irrelevant, became remarkable documents after the war.

I would add that analyst-operators differ depending on the disciplinary framework within which meaning is produced: historians, sociologists, ethnologists, and anthropologists use difference theoretical and methodological tools.

In a word: in this context, family audiovisual productions are inscribed in two spaces of communication:

- On the one hand, there is the space of communication of the document, where meaning is produced through the documentarizing mode, and the actants in the communication act as "researchers" to make films produce information;
- On the other hand, there is the space of collective memory: the film operator serves as a stimulator (*private mode*) and the actants behave as members of a community.

It can certainly happen that these spaces work on their own, but more often there is some *intersection*: the former miner who comes to the multi-media library at Saint-Étienne for a screening of home movies from the 1950s will no doubt allow himself to be carried away by the dimensions of remembrance and community, but at the same time he will be certain to learn a few things about his city. Similarly, the historian who works on a corpus of home movies to study the life of miners in the Loire Region, will doubtless feel the need – in order to flesh out their analysis – to appeal to their own memory and that of those who have lived that life.

Note: We can ask whether it would not have been more useful to construct just a single space of communication, the space of the archive, and to establish at its core two poles, in accordance as communication tends to move more towards memory or more towards the document. This solution would certainly have the advantage that it would signal the unity of the context of the archive, but it has two drawbacks. On the one hand, it places memories and documents on the same axis, thus suggesting that these experiences are of the same nature, which is at the very least up for discussion.[4] On the other hand, by placing these two notions on two poles of the same axis, it links them, thus preventing us from envisaging that one of them can work without any connection to the other (even an oppositional one). While it may be thought that the memory approach is most often combined with a good helping of the documentarizing approach, the latter can also work independently.

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[3] Goffman, *Frame Analysis.*

The Home Movie on Television

After archives, probably the most significant phenomenon when it comes to the migration of family audiovisual productions outside the family context is their rather persistent presence on television, on the news, in magazines, on talk shows (television can no longer have a writer, a painter, an athlete, a politician or a scientist on as a guest without showing excerpts from their home movies), not to mention the French home-movie show *Vidéo gag*.

If for the moment we exclude *Vidéo gag,* which belongs to another space, this migration can be described as a movement within the space of the document, and thus as an invitation to read these films in *documentarizing mode*. But while it is not incorrect, this way of conceiving things misses the point. Besides the fact that the informational content of the fragments of film that are broadcast is usually extremely low, this migration can be understood only if we relocate it within the perspective of the shift from *paleo-* to *neo*-television – that is, in the context of a change in structure thus in constraints within television itself. In the 1980s, economic and political changes did indeed lead television to favour a certain type of relationship to the viewer: a relationship of proximity replaced the pedagogical (hierarchical) relationship that is characteristic of *paleo*-television.[5] The use of home movies is a continuation of this movement: they serve as *proximity operators*. For example, by showing me the home movies of the personalities who have been invited, television brings me closer to them, because these films are like those of my family. Meaning is then produced in *intimate mode:* I will look, in my own life, for what I share with these guests. A relationship of empathy can then be established.

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[4] Cf.. the entire debate between memory and history: Nora, "Entre mémoire et histoire. La problématique des lieux"; Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

[5] Francesco Casetti and Roger Odin (1990), "De la paléo- à la néo-télévision," *Communications*, vol. 51 (1990), pp. 9–26.

But even more important than their content is the *origin* of these images. Directors of these programmes also make a point of underscoring this (often with a subtitle, "amateur pictures"), undoubtedly to get themselves off the hook for the poor quality of the images, but especially because mentioning this origin works as an *enunciative operator* that invites me to see these images as shots taken by people "like me," as opposed to a professional. From now on, these images appeal to me in a different way: they have a specific emotional force, a force that encourages me to accept them as they are without questioning their enunciator in terms of truth (their origin is the guarantee of their innocence). I use the term *authenticity mode* for the mode that, even as it invites me to construct a real enunciator, forbids me from questioning it in terms of the truth.

Definition: authenticity mode

- At the enunciative level: construction of a real enunciator constructed as "like me" at the level of identity
- At the discursive level: all textual productions are possible
- At the emotional level: the fact that this enunciator is "like me" produces an affective relationship that prohibits all questioning in terms of the truth

The authenticity mode is thus opposed to the documentarizing mode.

What is important when it comes to the television programmes I consider here, is to encourage the viewer to use the authenticity mode *within* the space of the document, and thus in competition with the documentarizing mode. The authenticity mode thus undermines the space of the document from within: it has nothing to do with the question of truth. It seems to me that what we have here is one of the major functions of the use of family audiovisual productions on television, but also in many other contexts: the effort to limit the opportunities for a critical mindset to take hold.

One thing that demonstrates the strength of the authenticity mode is advertising, which thinks nothing of creating fake home movies (identifiable by their topic, but also by blurry, shaky, poorly framed images, the noise of the projector, and so on) to deploy it. The idea is to exploit the point of intersection between family space and advertising space: the use of "ready-to-use" family scenes, but refocused around the product to be promoted. This involves the use of the fictional-communication trope: we see a fictional family addressee who comes into contact with the product – this with a view to targeting the actual addressee, the buyer watching at home. One thus comes to take the point of view of these films as perfectly objective, "since it is ours."[6] The use of this mode also makes a programme such as *Vidéo gag* something other than a show belonging to *the space of entertainment* – to which, however, it does undoubtedly belong. *Vidéo gag* is probably the most famous show when it comes to the migration of home movies to television: it has enjoyed continuous success since its launch in France in September 1990. It seems that it was the Japanese show *Kato-chan Ken-chan Gokigen TV* that got the idea off the ground in the mid-1980s. And now it, and variants of it, can be found the world over: *America's Funniest Home Videos* (US), *You've Been Framed* (UK), *Drôle de vidéo* (Canada), and so on.

In a way, the title says it all: it is about drastically reducing home movies to gags. The operator is both simple and remarkably effective: fragments of home movies are selected for the gags they show. These gags are then grouped by theme: falls, blows, weddings, pets, children, and so on. Finally, sound effects are added, as is a commentary (often in the form of a dialogue) to enhance the comic dimension of the situations involved. The fragments of home movies thus transformed are intended to be read in the *spectacularizing mode:* on the face of it, they are there only to make us laugh. Yet this is not quite how things work in the space of reception: yes, the spectacularizing mode is used to good effect, and yes, we laugh a lot, but what is happening goes well beyond this laughter. The show I see on the screen has people like me as enunciators (and I am like them): there are those performing in the gags, there is the one responsible for filming, and then there is the one who has decided to send these clips in to the television station. This enunciative relationship contradicts the effect of the distance from the spectacularizing mode, and encourages me to deploy the *authenticity mode* and acknowledge the indisputable truth of the images I am being shown: these series of gags that send me back a picture of myself and others that is ridiculous, grotesque, and frankly lamentable, tell the truth. *Vidéo gag* is not some innocent show: not only does it make me a participant in universal stupidity – it also invites me to accept it without any argument and, what is worse, to take pleasure in a radical exercise of self-contempt.

These analyses all point to the same conclusion: by inciting self-contempt (*Vidéo gag*) and by blocking questions about truth (documentarizing and advertising spaces), the migration of the home movie to television plays an ideological role: to reduce critical consciousness. In doing so, the home movie meets up with one of its primary functions in the space of the family: to prevent problems from being raised, to manufacture consensus, and to keep the institution going. Home movies summon up authenticity mode with such natural ease that we can speak of a *home-movie effect* to refer to this relationship between film and viewer – a relation in which the entire question of the truth is blocked out.

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[6] Marie-Thérèse Journot and Chantai Duchet, "Du privé au publicitaire," in Roger Odin (ed.), *Le film de famille. Usage privé, usage public* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck 1995), pp. 177–190.

From Home Movie to Micro-Histories

As we saw in the study on archives, the home movie is a really good documentary source. It is hardly surprising, then, that historians or citizens eager to escape their country's official history decide to use it to convey history. But how can we escape the *home-movie effect* when we are using this type of document for the purpose of historical reflection?

The series *Private Hungary* by Peter Forgács seems exemplary in the response it offers to this question. This series is made up of no fewer than a dozen feature films entirely produced by reassembling home movies (we have to do here with the *found-footage* tradition). The context of creation of these films allows us to offer a hypothesis to explain the director's use of this type of treatment: confronted in its history by the question of national existence at the heart of an empire, and subjected to multiple occupations over many years, Hungary has had its memory shattered. If it is true that, as Pierre Nora said, "there are *loci* of memory because there is no longer a community memory,"[7] we can understand why Forgács, a Hungarian director who wants to investigate the history of his country, would decide to turn to home movies, those wonderful *loci* of memory. In addition, it is not absurd to think that the change of scale will allow things to be seen differently than they are portrayed in the official history. We recognize here the micro-history problematic (Revel, 1996).

The first film in the series, *The Bartos Family* (1988), which I will take here as an example (it sets out the overall principles), explicitly claims its place in this tradition of historical research: The voice-over track tells us, "The saga of the Bartos is a Hungarian family novel, and the reflection of a private story."

Forgács's cinematographic work – the use of subtitles, the decomposition of movements, the use of freeze frame and slow motion, playing with the repetition of sequences, and the use of repetitive music – acts as an

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[7] Nora, "Entre mémoire et histoire. La problématique des lieux," p. xvii.

enunciative analyst-operator: its role is to explicitly show the director's point of view: "the world as seen by Zoltán Bartos," as the opening sequence of the film says. This programmatic statement is intended to make the *mediation* process the central subject of the film. The usual functioning of the cinematographic reference is modified: instead of reality in the present, we are shown *representations*. It is thus impossible to switch to interpreting in authenticity mode.

On the one hand, I am invited to read in *discursive mode:*

Definition of discursive mode

- At the discursive level: the construction of argumentation
- At the emotional level: emotions are used to convince (we have to do with rhetoric here)
- At the enunciative level: the construction of a real enunciator who can be asked questions about identity, ways of acting, and truth

On the other hand, the discursive mode occurs here at the meta-level: I am prompted to wonder what it is that gives the world seen by Zoltán Bartos its specificity.

The film quickly gives two answers: the world according to Zoltán Bartos consists first and foremost of his family and the family business. The father, "the head of the family," is also the "CEO of the timber business." We follow him as he gives a sort of guided tour of his workshops on the banks of the Danube with his board of directors. It is rare in a home movie to find sequences devoted to work. The fact that Zoltán Bartos has decided to film such a visit is certainly indicative of a bourgeois mindset. But what is most interesting is how we are shown the relationship to the world of work. During the visit, the film takes us into the workshops where workers are busy sawing boards. Whereas up to that point the film had merely let us hear music, it now reintroduces the noise of the workshops, in particular the piercing racket of the saws. A little later, between two shots of Bartos posing in front of his shop, the film will show woodworkers carrying huge boards to put them in a cart, and here again the soundtrack will be the noise of the boards falling into the cart. Because amateur film of the time was silent, the viewer knows that these noises are the result of post-production work and that the only enunciator there can be is thus Forgács. The only thing the viewer can do, then, is look for a deliberate meaning that exceeds their simple diegetic anchoring, and all the more so since the way the editing has been done encourages the construction of an oppositional system: whereas the Bartos family is associated with music, the noise is associated with the work the workers are doing, as though one were suddenly falling back to reality, to the concrete world (every noise makes us think of its source). Without making it explicit, the film makes the viewer realize that it is the very real work of others that allows the bourgeoisie to "live well" ("he [Bartos] had a factory and a shop that allowed him to live well").

On the other hand, a few sentences from the voice-over pointing up the historical events of the period, with images showing us members of the bourgeoisie dancing, wining and dining (Hitler's *Anschluss* of Austria, laws on the Jews, and so on) are enough for Peter Forgács to give us a real sense of the indifference to history that bourgeois society showed. The film makes clear that the bourgeoisie saw nothing coming – neither Nazism nor communism. The conclusion of the film focuses directly on this obliviousness to history: while we attend the communist May Day parade, Peter Forgács adds a song by Kazal: "When did Napoleon win or lose a great battle? In what year was he Emperor? When was he crowned? They can ask me all they like – I can't answer, because there's never been a date in history I could recall."

But there is more: while blocking interpretation in authenticity mode, Peter Forgács has understood how much he could get out of the emotional potential within these images. He uses these fuzzy, whitewashed images of the past to free up their figural dimension, while putting in place a series of processes to force us to take some distance. It is a matter of putting this emotional potential at the service of reflexive thinking. The music by Tibor Szemzo (his favourite composer) acts as a sort of commentary on the images. It is the voice of history, a voice that prompts us to question these images by projecting us into the future (it is in relation to the impending disasters that they produce meaning). The noises, which strike us even in proportion to their rarity, also play on this premonitional mode (the train sequences, which make us think of the trains for the concentration camps) or check off problems in the images – problems that, without the noises, we would not have seen: problems around the relationship of the bourgeoisie to the real, around class relations, and so on. As for the voice-over comments, which are few and far between, and which are offered under the guise of very simple structures (often short noun phrases), they are far from neutral. These short sentences say both too much and not enough, thus prompting us to construct the discourse ourselves. The film presents us with a text perforated with holes, fragmentary, incomplete, and sometimes seemingly disordered, which we need to complete and organize. Thus all the film work Peter Forgács does, he does to make us ask questions about the images it shows us. *The Bartos Family* belongs to the category of *stimulating* films (to borrow a formula used by Alain Resnais about his film *Muriel*). It seeks to involve us in historical reflection – a reflection that goes far beyond just the Bartos case, because it bears on the position of the bourgeoisie in history.

In *The Bartos Family*, the use of home movies, far from blocking the question of truth, puts it at the very heart of the construction, but it took important cinematographic work to get to that result. This work consists in analysing the home movie as an ideological operator that reveals the behaviour of a social class. The passage to a meta-level space of communication is what makes this analysis possible: the cinematographic work brings about the creation of a *"discursive" critical space* in relation to that of home movies. Peter Forgács's film is a kind of semio-historical analysis, on film, of home movies.

The Home Movie in the Space of Art

The film *A Song of Air* by the Australian Merilee Bennett Air (1987) is presented as a letter to her late father. At the beginning of the film, a text, handwritten by Merilee herself, tells us that the images in this film come from the home movies shot by her father, the reverend Arnold Lucas Bennett, who had filmed his family with unflagging regularity from 1956 to 1983. From the images we are shown, it is clear that Merilee's father was a "good filmmaker": not only are the images sharp and well framed, but the films are carefully constructed – we could even say: directed: "On holidays, he would gather us together to be in his movie; we staged the departure so he could film the farewell and the car pulling away," runs the voice-over. The father even created scenarios, all of which had the same theme: a family threatened by outside danger. "We were playing our one life for the sake of his movies. The important thing was to be together, and feel the same way about the world." Shots taken automatically show us the father surrounded by his wife and children, keeping them under his thumb, embracing them with his long arms, moving them around to arrange a family-style portrait, and asking them again and again to look at the camera. Doing that means looking together in the same direction and thus bearing witness to the family's unity as a group. Here, form closely follows content. Images are placed in order, regulated, policed, always being controlled: images of the moral and familial order that the father (a dyed-in-the-wool Baptist) imposes uncompromisingly within his family.

The result of this upbringing, in which cinema plays an important role – "almost every Sunday evening, after tea, we would watch movies; we saw ourselves growing up as time went by…" – is presented in the words of the letter that Merilee reads in a voiceover: it is the story of her revolt against the family order and against films that both reflect and advance it. In the text of this letter, Merilee explains to her father how and why she threw herself into a life exactly that is the opposite of the one he had planned for her, how she became a topless waitress in a brothel, and how she prostituted herself and took drugs.

In the face of a "well-made" home movie that's "made too well" and that coerces its family viewers, another kind of coercion, in the form of violence, has to result. The violence here is that of art. Not only does Merilee cut and reassemble the images from her father's films in order to make them fit into what *she* is saying – she also does cinematographic work that plays a game that is the opposite of the work done by her father: she de-structures the images that were made by her father and that are framed too well, that are too sharp and too clean, by reworking them through decomposition and recomposition or by tackling the very substance of the images (by adding graininess). That creates these moments of considerable formal beauty, notably in a sequence in which Merilee is swimming under a waterfall: the shot is paused a number of times in succession, so we see the torrent of water drops through a succession of frozen images showing the young girl's determination to hold her own against this force that is submerging her.

It is only at the end of this long work – which feels a bit like it is torturing the film, the filmmaker herself, and the father – that Merilee can say to her father, "I love you."

A Song of Air is a good example of what we can call "films that settle scores through the home movie." There are plenty of films of this kind from pretty much all over the world, especially final student projects in art schools or universities, for which students reassemble home movies. You could almost say it has become a genre.

The context in which these films appear is almost always the same. After being subjected to an extremely restrictive family order (sociopsychological constraints), the child breaks free, trying to find their way, and embarks on a life that is precisely the opposite of what the family had planned for them: we are in the *space of personal construction* (identity). This move is the *operator* that will allow them to take their distance from the *home-movie effect* (which has often been one of the instruments of an imposed order) and to return to these films in the *intimate mode*, but with a critical point of view. Not only is the euphoria that predominates in home movies denounced as untrue, but home movies appear, on this reading, as formidable operators of oppression: everything that was meant to promote fulfilment and guarantee happiness is seen as destructive.

On the other hand, the search for a life that is the opposite of the one planned by the family leads the girl or the young man to turn to the *space of art*: it is there that the encounter with cinema takes place (for instance, Merilee Bennett studied photography and cinema at Philip Institute of Technology in Melbourne). The space of art is particularly well suited to the psychological problems that these young people have to solve: it is a space in which they will be able to take on the role of *author* and thus of the subject responsible for production – that is, a space in which they will be able to assert their identity. What better way, then, to settle accounts with the past than by taking possession of the films of one's own father and using his home movies for one's own personal creative ends? The *operator* is the work of artistic creation. Significantly, *A Song of Air* begins and ends with images of Merilee at the editing table working on her father's 16-mm films. It is not a matter, however, of switching to a meta-level, as in *The Bartos Family*. The work done on home movies is more radical here: it can be described as involving the *destruction* of the father's home movies, followed by the work of *reappropriation* in order to transform these films into personal work.

Finally, having home movies migrate to the space of art means bringing them into a *public space* (as against the private space of the family), which is not only a strong act of emancipation, but also an obvious demand for recognition: in this space, the films will be read in artistic mode – that is, in relation to their author (*A Song of Air* is a film by Merilee Bennett). The text thus produced has a two-fold status: on the one hand, it is an *œuvre* asking to be seen as belonging to the space of art; on the other, it is a gesture of identity affirmation. We are at the *intersection* between the space of art and that of personal construction.

But there is another way for home movies to migrate into the space of art: from the outset, artists conceive of their home movies as part of this space. Jonas Mekas and Stan Brakhage are undoubtedly among the initiators of this movement, but there are many artists working in this way. The titles clearly show the relationship to the home movie: *Oh My Mother, Oh My Father, The Sons* (Kohei Ando), *The Family Album* (Alan Berliner), *Der Fater* [sic] (Nol Brinckmann), *Family Portraits* (John Porter), and so on. Sometimes the designation is even simpler and more explicit: *Home Movie* (Vito Acconci, Jane Oxenberg, Lee Ann Brown, Taylor Mead, et al.).

We might ask whether it is legitimate to talk here about migration, in so far as there is no change of context but immediate integration into another: art. It seems to me, however, that we have a case of migration here, because the home movie is a genre assigned to a space of communication: the family. Getting this type of production into the space of art involves a real shift. Perhaps we could talk about a *mental migration*, because this shift is made first and foremost in the director's mind. The viewer, for their part, is encouraged to make a move in the opposite direction: faced with a production that claims to belong to the space of art, they are forced to recognize that it originated in the family space.

The space of art thus overlaps with that of the family, but this overlap is a merger. It is not a fusion, or a meta-relationship with a critical aim (as in *The Bartos Family*). Nor is it a relationship of destruction and re-appropriation (as in *A Song of Air*). We have to do, rather, with a relationship of *domination*: the space of art is imposed on the family space. Even though they are still home movies, they are made to be interpreted in artistic mode by an audience outside the family: those who direct them claim to be *auteurs* (artists) and demand to be recognized as such.

In these films, as in the home movie, signs showing that they are badly made are everywhere to be found, but – and this is the key distinction – in this case they are there on purpose. In this context, they become part of the *auteur's* brand signature (we can spot one of Mekas's films right away from his way of playing with skipped frames) and they will be read in aesthetic mode (the viewer enjoys the malleable aspect of these images: blurry, overexposed, grainy, with unsteady pans, and so on.). But we must see all the same that, in order to work, these tropes require that viewers agree to read them in this mode. And that assumes in turn that these viewers belong to the same "interpretive community" as the director (Fish, 1980; Allard, 1995) – that is, that they are part of the same aesthetic space of communication.

It is thus on the basis of the *aesthetic space* that this interpretation authorizes the entry of these films into the space of art and interpretation in artistic mode. If these actants are not part of the *same* aesthetic space of communication, they will simply be rejected.

The Home Movie in the Medical Context

I will finish with this quick analysis of the migrations of home movies, evoking a context that is rather different from all those I have mentioned up to now: that of medical research.

The first example is within the framework of research on developmental psychology. Psychologists[8] call on parents of autistic children to lend them their home movies so they can try to spot the clues, the warning signs that would make it possible to offer an early diagnosis of autism and thus to treat it more effectively. The review covers babies from birth to eighteen months. The goal is to identify signs of "relational withdrawal": children with pervasive development disorders have more-significant and longer-lasting scores on relational withdrawal in the first months of their lives than do other babies. It is the axis of relevance that governs the interpretation of these movies in this context. The interpretation is done here by researcher-actants – we are in the *space of scientific research* – that is, of actants who deploy a rather specific *operator*: a package of thorough knowledge without which we would not even know what to look at on the axis of relevance that has been chosen. The mode of production of meaning is the documentarizing mode. The home movie becomes a stand-in experimental laboratory. While it is impossible for researchers to carry out investigations within families themselves in order to study children's behaviour, the home movie makes such research possible: seeing a home movie is a little like living with this family in the months when the film was shot. In this operation – in contrast to what we saw in *The Bartos Family* – the home movie as a medium is erased: it is regarded as *transparent*, and gives direct access to the signs documenting the issue of autism. The enunciator questioned by the interpretation in documentarizing mode is not the film, but the family itself.

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[8] Jean-Louis Adrien and Maria Pilar Gattengo, "Dépistage précoce de l'autisme à l'aide des films familiaux: apport de la recherche et d'une démarche rétrospective dans la démarche de

Other practitioners use the home movie to help patients who are suffering from severe memory problems. Here we are in the *space of therapy.* Jean-Claude Leners[9] tells how, at the Centre gérontologique de Pontalize in Luxembourg, "reminiscing sessions" are arranged for patients suffering from Korsakoff's syndrome, during which clips of home movies are projected. These clips are not necessarily of the patients' own home movies: they can be of any family. The sessions take place once a week. The communication operator consists of micro-sequences of one to two minutes, based around key moments in life such as a birth, a marriage, school, work, and local traditions – moments that each patient will be able to recognize. It is here that the use of the home movie is particularly relevant: its heavily stereotyped character is a valuable asset, because the images will be all the more likely to resonate with patients. These sequences are then projected,

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soins," in Alain Haddad, Antoine Guedeney and Tim Greacen (eds.), *Santé mentale du jeune enfant: prévenir et intervenir* (Toulouse: éditions Erès, 2004), pp. 85–93.

[9] Jean-Claude Leners, "Reminiscence: A Way to Use Amateur Films in Order to Work with Patients Suffering from Memory Problems" in Sonja Kmec and Viviane Thill (eds.), *Private Eyes and the Public Gaze: The Manipulation and Valorisation of Amateur Images* (Trier: Kliomedia, 2009), pp. 97–99.

either on their own or in series (based around the same theme). For these screenings, the sequences are chosen so as to form a relationship with the outside environment. For example, if a given screening takes place in December, it will focus on activities having to do with Christmas. If it is in July, the emphasis will be on summer-holiday pictures, and so on. The constraints on the context thus reinforce the power of the images shown, or at least resonate with them so as to enhance their galvanizing power. Patients look at these sequences in a group in a hospital room. The idea is to stimulate the *intimate mode* of meaning production by using the *private mode.* After each screening, the sequences are discussed in a group, but patients are asked to call up their most intimate memories. This process of remembrance is helped along by the group discussion and the overall context. The long-term objective is to allow people in the group to get into a more stable living environment. Finally, all sessions are transcribed, so the practitioners can use information from other sessions. The text produced is therefore twofold: on the one hand there are the stories the patients tell; on the other, the transcripts that will in turn serve as operators. But beyond this textual production, the key is in the *act* that is performed both in relation to patients and by them. The role of home movies is explicitly *performative* here: to elicit a response in order then to offer treatment.

These analyses show the great variety of contexts into which a production can migrate, and the complexity of the constructions that are needed in order to take account of one's place in these various contexts. However, it is possible to summarize the approach. (It would be no different if, instead of studying the migration from one type of production, as I did here, I were to study that of a single production such as a film, a photograph, a painting, a text, or a piece of music.)

By contrast with the previous chapter, which held to a single axis of communication that was posited *a priori* at the start of the analysis, analysing the migration of a production into different contexts requires first and foremost that we ask ourselves about the axes and the spaces of communication that we must construct in order to take account of the workings of this production in these contexts. Which communication space or spaces are the more relevant to helping us understand what is happening? How many spaces of communication do we have to construct? We have seen, for instance, that, while for the archives I have constructed two spaces of communication corresponding to the two modes that have been evoked, I have thought it more appropriate, in order to account for the use of home movies as documents on television, to construct only one mode – and this even though, here too, two modes are involved. It is a matter in this case of strategic decisions that the analyst has a duty to take on what seem most clearly to them to be the most important points of the communication experience being analysed.

Once the space or spaces of communication have been fixed upon, the construction of the actants and the operators of communication proceeds as it did in the previous chapter. The next question, once several spaces of communication have been constructed, has to do with the relationship between and among them: the analyses in this chapter have highlighted intersectional relationships, and those involved in the movement to the meta level, in superposition, and in domination. The next chapter will show that yet other relationships are possible.

We can still ask what is left of the original space in the new context, what the role of this reference to the origin is, and what effects this reference produces. We can then try to characterize what becomes of the productions in the new context. What is their status? When it comes to home movies, that status ranges from the document to their reduction to a series of gags or to the signs of autism (with the erasure of the medium), via their positioning as objects of analysis (*The Bartos Family*), or to their destruction or reconstruction (*A Song of Air*). And what about their role? Here again, analyses show the diversity of responses: a role that is informative, relational, ideological, based around identity, therapeutic, and so on.

Finally, we must question the why of the migrations themselves, for these do not happen for no reason. They are not innocent. Thus the proliferation of family-film migrations today draws on the existence of a vast space of communication that is shot through by strong identitarian and communitarian temptations, but also by a change in the relationships among intimate, private and public. Taken together, these migrations are part, both of the effects produced by the constraints that result from this space, and of its operators: they help, at the level they operate to strengthen and extend it.

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