

## Are We in the Movies Now ?

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### Article abstract

The popularity of 8mm, home movie making swelled to notable proportions in the postwar period and throughout the 1950s, at which point 8mm movie cameras were in their widest, popular use in North American families. This paper explores the rise to ubiquity of postwar home movie production by tracing its cultural precedent to the mass-popularization of photography in the late-nineteenth century, and the ways in which a producing and consuming visual culture established itself in the family.

# Are We in the Movies Now? <sup>1</sup>

Stacey Johnson

## RÉSUMÉ

La popularité du 8mm à titre de film de famille atteignit un niveau remarquable pendant la période de l'après-guerre et durant les années cinquante, à un point tel que les caméras 8mm trouvèrent à cette époque leur utilisation la plus répandue au sein des familles nord-américaines. Cet article explore l'apogée de cette production du film de famille d'après-guerre tout en établissant un lien avec les précédents culturels de la popularisation, la photographie de la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, et de la façon dont la production et la consommation de la culture visuelle se sont développées elles-mêmes dans les familles.

## ABSTRACT

The popularity of 8mm, home movie making swelled to notable proportions in the postwar period and throughout the 1950s, at which point 8mm movie cameras were in their widest, popular use in North American families. This paper explores the rise to ubiquity of postwar home movie production by tracing its cultural precedent to the mass-popularization of photography in the late-nineteenth century, and the ways in which a producing and consuming visual culture established itself in the family.

The popularity of home movie making swelled to notable proportions in the postwar period and throughout the 1950s. Popular magazines, camera manufacturers and their "ad men" waxed sentimentally over the production and consumption of home movies as integral companions to family history. Indeed, if one truly wanted to assure the memory of baby's first steps,

what better way to preserve these precious gestures than by capturing them on film, and in movement. Although seemingly a baby boom novelty, home movie production was by no means a new phenomenon in the 1950s. In 1923, 16mm had been vetted as the North American amateur standard. Shortly thereafter in 1932, 8mm, the infinitely more inexpensive and family-friendly format, was introduced. Due to its perceived social and technical accessibility, and the ever-expanding association of 16mm production with television, documentary, educational, and semi-professional production, 8mm became the medium syphoned off to unskilled amateurs, an association which was directly proportionate to the format's overwhelming appropriation in families.

It is the caliber of 8mm film's slated appropriation in family contexts which is at the heart of the present inquiry. In the most comprehensive and critical institutional and historical account of these practices to date, Patricia Zimmermann has argued that "[...] not only do economic, aesthetic, political, and familial power relations construct the category of amateur film but a negative, compensatory relation to professional film also inscribes its discourse." (p. xii) Zimmermann foregrounds the discourses and institutional alliances which, by establishing unequivocal terms for professional practice and technical standards, simultaneously functioned to subordinate amateur production and its technical gadgetry to the institutionally, and technically superior pursuits of professional cinematic practice. By her account, instructional and professional discourses — the amalgam of home movie manuals, related popular literature, parenting advice, and Hollywood promotion — represented the "industry's" attempt to impose an "official" culture of film making practice on the "popular" culture of family movie making; in other words, the cultural dominant disciplines its subordinate.

Amateur film making in the context of the family, however, seems to beg a richness of analysis which exceeds its discursive subordination as a pseudo-professional craft. It would appear that home movies, and photographs for that matter, are meaningful precisely because we summon them to fill the volatile spaces of memory, often dismissing the technics of their produc-

tion in favour of the expectation of their consumption. The professional discourses which attempted to align family image making practices with professionalism also anticipated the home as a site for privatized spectatorship and for past-looking. Arguably, the same discourses which championed professional technique also championed the necessity for history. While we may intuit from instructional literature a certain wishful delivery of film making style and aesthetics on the part of the producers of this literature, one question lurks in the background here: are "home movies," their production and consumption, analyzable as "movies?"

Although circumscribed in the illegitimate shadows of professional film's legitimacy, home movie making practices were shaped as much (if not more) by the mass-popularization of photographic practices across the social landscape, and their inauguration in turn of the century bourgeois family life. Photography as a family history practice wedged itself between an increasing cultural fascination with the privatization of temporal experience, and the homogenization of public temporal experience, both cultural effects of the electric age.<sup>2</sup> What needs to be articulated in a discussion of moving image production in the family, then, are its social and communicative relations to the precursory productive and consumptive effects of popularized family photography.

I would like to insist upon a radical specificity of image making practices as they have been appropriated, performed, and braided into the fabric of family memory. Home movie making's legacy is in part wedded to its subordination to the professional realm; however, there is a pre-history here which hinges on the representation of personal historical consciousness, and the location of the personal in popular history. I do not wish to argue that the home and the social institution of the family are impermeable where professional and prescriptive discourses are concerned; image making, after all, is a cultural as well as a personal phenomenon. Rather, my aim is to search the shadows for home movie making's relationship to the development and ongoing refinement of a visual culture in the home and family. In this respect, home movie making's historical location in the

family is more prismatic than its comparison to professional film discourse is equipped to reveal. Thus, I would like to elasticize the boundaries of Patricia Zimmermann's evaluation of home movie making practices as predominantly practices which were discursively produced *vis-à-vis* professional codes and prescriptions. In so doing, I would like to reconsider home movie making's genealogy as the feigned and ineffectual copy of professional film, and situate it more emphatically as a representational practice nurtured and sustained by an already ensconced visual culture in the home and family.

Methodologically, this paper explores the comparative and analytical structure of home movie making's discursive origins as those which are historically tied to the social and industrial phenomenon of necessitating image making as a family practice, and not exclusively as a film history one. Historically, and even technologically and ideologically speaking, this might at first glance appear to be a bit messy in that the analysis comparatively mixes media. I maintain, however, that this is a strategic move. I would like to clarify that what propels my inquiry is first and foremost a belief that when it comes to family photos, family films, or even family videos for that matter, what differentiates these artifacts may be their individual media forms, but more importantly what pulls them together in an analysis is the way in which each underscores the representation of family history, and the reproduction of family memory, aesthetically and nostalgically. This analysis draws, as has Zimmermann, from popular instructional, promotional, and corporate materials, and uses these materials to blaze a somewhat different historical trail. In particular, I wish to draw attention to the assumptions and interventions made on the part of industrialists like George Eastman, memorialized as both pioneer and father of popular image making, about how the production and consumption of images would fit into day to day life.<sup>3</sup> I seek specifically to isolate a historical moment in which mechanical image making became accessible and practical, wherein there was the potential for the widest, popular use of image making technologies, especially with respect to documenting family and home life. The fact that image making practices are appropriated in the family

precisely to indulge the telling of privileged moments of our personal histories suggests there is more at stake here than simply the poorly choreographed aping of professional practice. Are we in the movies, or are we ensconced in (and obsessed by) the visual representation of our lives and ancestry? How then has the moving image been inserted into the recitation of family history, and the fabrication of glorious pasts?

### *Reel Families*

*Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* takes as its object a domain of inquiry identified by visual anthropologists as the “home mode.”<sup>4</sup> In this work Patricia Zimmermann interrogates the assemblage of power relations which has produced the category of amateur film, its production and consumption. She maps amateur film practices onto a discursive grid composed of industrial, professional, and familial power relations in order to shatter an analysis of these practices as innocent and utopian examples of individual creativity, and personal media empowerment. *Reel Families*, then, culls home movie making and amateur film from expert discourses traced to popular magazines, instruction, publicity, and the film industry itself. With attention to distinct historical periods, Zimmermann takes professional film discourses underwritten by economic and aesthetic rationales, and uses them to understand how amateurs are evaluated based on the production and technological choices they make. *Reel Families* begins at the level of the professional and the official in order to invent its object of inquiry, amateur film, wherein a pronounced divide between the professional and the amateur punctuates and steers the analysis.

The comparative time line used to compel this argument is not an arbitrary one, and zeroes in on a developmental period of amateur film making exclusively. She distinguishes three distinct periods of amateur film development. These are: 1897-1923 during which a definition of amateur film was offset by 1) the establishment of 35mm as the professional standard, and 2) the North American standardization and introduction of 16mm equipment as strictly an amateur format in 1923; next, the interwar period in which 16mm and 8mm together were

emphasized for amateur use including family appropriation<sup>5</sup>; and, finally, the postwar period in which 16mm graduated from family production and became associated almost exclusively with semi-professional practices (hobbyists, film artists), and documentary, educational, and training film production.<sup>6</sup>

8mm became synonymous with activities of families and less so with diversely creative and artistic pursuits.<sup>7</sup> Its popularity in family scenarios is explainable in terms of a giddy return to reproduction in the postwar period and 1950s; renewed excitement around image making, cultivated in large part by the producers of image making paraphernalia who were busy reconverting their wartime production machine to fit with a peacetime economy; and, finally, the availability and variety of inexpensive gadgetry, and, eventually, the disposable incomes necessary to bring them home. Notions of social and familial accessibility, however, were already at the forefront in 1932. Faithful to the same tried and true policy upon which it staked its claim to popular photography in the late-nineteenth century, Eastman Kodak pitched 8mm movie cameras as technologies that would place “home movies within the means of all;” less-expensive than the Ciné-Kodak, the Ciné-Kodak 8’s purchase was in its ability to double the image making capacity of a 16mm reel of film, an innovation Eastman Kodak was careful not to associate with depression-era thinking.<sup>8</sup>

Such a pitch on the part of Eastman Kodak played into popular and rampant discourses about the democratic possibilities for the media, and especially for film. It also went one step further to emphasize how keeping memories on film could also be democratized and put into the hands of the people: the ongoing technological stimulation of personal historical consciousness, and its dissemination in terms of the moving image. With its emphasis on family image conservation in the forms of first photograph and photographic negative albums, and later film duplicates and film humidors, Eastman Kodak pushed the need for the image as the vessel of family memory. Hardly a challenge to the snapshot, the new technological practice of keeping moving image records intensified image making in the family as a personal historical imperative. The social and memorial func-

tion of personal movie making in the family, therefore, eased comfortably into the grooves of popular photographic amusement to further enhance the representation of family / personal time.

This is where I would like to take a path different from, yet influenced by the one proposed by Zimmermann, to see what “other” trajectories home movie making might pronounce. The negotiation of home movie practices in the shadows of professional cinematic discourse indeed eludes the fact that home movie making and consumptive practices could be sustained in the family precisely because the mechanisms for a familial visual culture were already in place. Jean-Louis Comolli, for one, has emphasized the cinema’s function as a social machine, and is worth noting here.<sup>9</sup> He has argued that the conditions for a development of the cinema were anticipated by social arrangements of the nineteenth century — in particular the social formation and circulation of large groups of people in public spaces for the purposes of engaging in spectatorial pleasure. Cultural conceptions of time, leisure and new modes of recreation, as well as social accessibility helped to create an amicable current for the flow of photographic image making practices into social, and certainly family life.

Culturally speaking, the popularization of photographic image making practices represented a node in the modern bifurcation of temporal experience. Stephen Kern has argued that two contrasting cultural views about time (public and private) were under consideration during the period 1880-1918. (Kern, p. 33) An artistic and intellectual *Zeitgeist* “[...] affirmed the reality of private time” and juxtaposed itself against the “[...] massive, collective force of uniform public time.” (Kern, p. 64) Durkheim, for example, insisted upon the social relativity of time; Freud used therapy and the case studies to enable and interpret the individual’s search for a personal past; and Joyce endeavored to represent the fusion of time and space, a social and cultural by-product of telegraphy, by merging past, present, and future time together on the page.<sup>10</sup> It is not by accident, then, that the representation of personal experience in terms of image production coincided with such temporal distinction.



The social accessibility and dissemination of photographic image making practices, a phenomenon prodded by innovations in roll film and newly affordable and portable apparatuses, extended to a burgeoning middle class the possibility for representing personal time and social time which could bypass formal photographic studio practices, and hitherto laborious image production and processing procedures. By the late-nineteenth century advertizing had begun to chart a national and transnational course in popular print media. Advertisements for photographic materials simultaneously individualized and consolidated the familial and bourgeois prominence of image making, especially with respect to babies and children. In the figure of the child, as both photographic subject and camera operator, lay the promise of the future as well as the privilege of personalizing history in photographic images amidst the homogeneous march of time.

New modes of recreation offered fertile terrain upon which to sow the pleasures of image production and consumption. We might, for example, see popular image making's relationship to the bicycle, another form of "new recreation" at the close of the nineteenth century, as offering up some clues as to how the popular phenomenon of image making literally began to circulate among other social phenomena: transportation and visual communication. The photographic mount which could be integrated into bicycle frames illustrates nicely the fusion between leisurely (and upward) mobility and image making. Combined cycling and photographic interest and a popular literature to go along with it, for example, popped up in the United States and England at century's close. In London, the journal *Cycle and Camera*, addressed these two popular recreations together by providing touring and photographing advice, news from amateur cyclist / photographers around the world, as well as information about products that would be of interest to a growing middle-class for whom leisure and these two new popular recreations were accessible.<sup>11</sup> Cycling and photography for turn of the century middle to upper-class women were indeed fashionable in which it was not uncommon for aristocratic ladies "[...] to seat themselves on a bicycle or stand by it when they are having their pictures taken."<sup>12</sup> Photographing one's family, home,

and social escapades were all considered affable for virtuous ladies of leisure.<sup>13</sup> Popular photography as a recreational activity, however, was not without social resistance. Opposed to its unbridled popularization were those who had claimed image making as a “dignified” art and skillful practice, and who feared that the practice could only be debased by the new photographic technologies which removed social barriers to photography by accommodating anyone who wanted to make images.<sup>14</sup>

### **You Take the Picture...**

Eastman Kodak<sup>15</sup> was one of the first to begin looking to personal and domestic relations as sites wherein cameras would have useful applications. What Kodak needed to make such a pursuit possible was a camera that would be easy to use and portable, and one that could bypass the use of the debilitating and chemically messy plate process. The No. 1 Kodak (1888), the first hand-held, portable, roll film camera conceived of for amateur and family use, did the trick. “You push the button, we do the rest” was the slogan which instituted the practice of no-fuss, popular photography. This mantra suggested more than a departure from the drudgery of cumbersome technology and plate processes; it juxtaposed the possibility for the personal and “photo-realist” documentation of public events, with the personal and “photo-realist” documentation of private ones, thereby incorporating expressions of personal time into popular time.

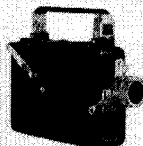
Eastman was wise to begin hocking his wares nationally (and very soon after transnationally) just six months after introducing the No. 1 Kodak. In the company’s first national advertizing campaign, Eastman specifically requested that the Kodak be shown in use “for every possible purpose.” In a letter to one of his graphic designers, Eastman, overseer of Eastman Kodak’s advertizing affairs for most of his time as president and CEO, ordered a series of pen sketches depicting individuals and families out and about with Kodaks in a variety of activities which included sports (use on a bicycle), travel, family leisure, parties, and so on.<sup>16</sup> Mobility, activity, and family accessibility were significant denominators for Eastman’s campaign, as were women. Soon after in correspondence with a different designer Eastman wrote, “[...] we want a

# Forecast for '46...



CINÉ-KODAK  
MAGAZINE 8

Three-second loading with interchangeable Kodachrome or Panchromatic film magazines;  $f/1.9$  lens interchangeable with six accessory lenses, including a wide-angle lens and ranging out to a five-times telephoto; enclosed direct-view finder serves all lenses; four operating speeds including slow motion; unique footage-indicator control "doubles" as magazine release when changing film; pulsing button for gauging scene length; attached Universal Guide for all Ciné-Kodak Films.



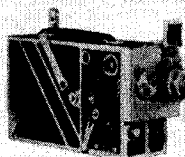
CINÉ-KODAK  
MAGAZINE 16

Slip-in interchangeable loading with any of four Ciné-Kodak full-color or black-and-white films;  $f/1.9$  lens interchangeable with six accessory lenses ranging from a wide-angle to a six-times telephoto; full-vision eye-level finder serves all available lenses; three operating speeds, including slow motion; automatic motor shut-off; pulsing button for judging scene length; magazine footage indicator shows unused film whether magazine is in or out of camera; attached Ciné-Kodak Universal Guide.



CINÉ-KODAK  
EIGHT-25

Roll loading—takes the same famous Ciné-Kodak Films provided for the "Magazine 8," plus low-cost Ciné-Kodak Eight "Pan" Film; has fixed-focus  $f/2.7$  lens; secured winding key; locking position for exposure button so movie maker can get into the picture; full-vision eye-level finder combined with carrying handle; automatic footage indicator; Ciné-Kodak Universal Guide serving all Ciné-Kodak Films; combines all practical economy of equipment and operation with top dependability.



CINÉ-KODAK  
SPECIAL

The one "amateur standard" movie camera acclaimed by engineers, biologists, physicists, doctors, athletic coaches, makers of industrial, advertising, and training films—and all other advanced workers in 16mm. movies—as adequate for the filming problems they must overcome and for the professional effects they desire. No first camera for the newcomer—yet definitely the ultimate camera for those seeking easy mastery of 16mm. movies at their very best.

## Ciné-Kodaks and Kodascopes are on the way

ONLY a very few—right now. Then, more and more in the weeks and months to come... economy "Eights"... versatile, easy-to-operate Magazine Ciné-Kodaks—both 8mm. and 16mm.—the most popular movie cameras in the world, regardless of price... and that finest of all 16mm. cameras, Ciné-Kodak Special. Kodascopes will return by the same schedule... 8mm. silent projectors... 16mm.

projectors, both silent and sound.

See your Ciné-Kodak dealer—soon—about your future Ciné-Kodak. And while you're there, stock up on Ciné-Kodak Film... full-color Kodachrome or brilliant black-and-white. He should have all you want—just in time for your spring movie making.

Eastman Kodak Company,  
Rochester 4, N. Y.

Kodak

## Publicité caméra Kodak 8 mm

Collection Cinémathèque québécoise

drawing of the figure of a lady stylishly and suitably dressed with a Kodak case slung over her shoulder and a Kodak in her hand in position to make an exposure." <sup>17</sup> This corporate ideology suggest-

ed a looking-inward to personal life as both a refuge from, and a means by which to insert oneself into standardized and public temporality. The potential use of these cameras also suggested a means by which to personalize experience, and to further differentiate it according to gender, and, of course, generation.

It was Eastman's intention from the beginning to make the Kodak a household word, and more importantly to make the camera a ubiquitous technology, both succeeding in revolutionizing the practice of popular photography, and, in fact, fashioning it.<sup>18</sup> It would be short-sighted to wholly attribute the success of popular photography to one individual and the psychology behind advertizing campaigns. However, what we must recognize in Eastman's contributions are more subtly the know-how to bring together in popular imaginations already-existing popular recreations and practices, family and home, sentimentality and history, the social accessibility of memory, and socially accessible technologies. He might not have "caused" the craze, but he certainly intended to.

To promote the Brownie in 1900, the every person's and every child's box, dollar camera, Eastman pilfered the product's name<sup>19</sup> and caricatures for its package design from contemporary and well-known, children's book author Palmer Cox's popular storybook characters, "The Brownies."<sup>20</sup> Eastman explicitly appropriated the iconography from one popular cultural artifact to champion the popularization of another. And so it was written: "plant the Brownie acorn and the Kodak oak will grow."<sup>21</sup> In other words, start them young and you will have customers for life. To further illustrate Eastman Kodak's interest in the picture-making youth (and an interest in capital procurement), in honour of the company's 50th anniversary in 1930 it gave away 500 000 Brownie cameras in the U.S. and 50 000 Brownies in Canada to children aged 12. To push the promotion, Eastman Kodak called on contemporary "experts" in child education, representatives from the Girl and Boy Scouts, and the former First Lady of the United States, Mrs. Calvin Coolidge to extol the virtues of image making for children.<sup>22</sup> Image making, a gender inclusive pursuit, had also been disseminated and declared as a generationally inclusive one.

Cameras and promotional jargon went hand in hand with instructional and other popular discourses. A glut of popular photographic literature very quickly became available, the individual titles of which pointed to the diverse textual communities of amateur photographers who rallied around them. Of these, *Kodakery*, Eastman Kodak's publication for amateur photographers, and *Better Photos*, put out by Sears, Roebuck in which they promoted their own line of cameras, circulated widely and were written to appeal to the largest common denominator of users. Both debuted in 1913. What this literature did was to reiterate over and over again the possible uses for cameras in the family and home, and while out and about. Calendars and photo greeting cards were regular features. The art and craft of calendar making enlivened the incorporation of personal images and representations of private time into the yearly march of time. The motif of the personalized photo calendar emphasized different notions of time by fusing the personal past (images) with narratives of the present and future, all against the backdrop of public and ritualized time. Vacation picture books, albums, and picture diaries could and should be shared with friends and relatives: the repetition of shared experiences; the solidification of family history. Impromptu home pictures of the children would yield variety in such chronicles, variety and diversity being virtues all album keepers should strive for.

The home was singled out early on as a site for the consumption of images, especially since the technological limitations of early cameras could not always facilitate the production of images in the inadequately lit spaces of the household without either being by a window in the light of day, or with the aid of light-giving gadgets. This literature highlighted the decorative spaces of the household as sites of display and consumption. Later, this household consumption would eventually be realized in notions of privatized spectatorship and the decorative consoles which augmented the home movie set-up. In the mid teens, the Kodiopticon, a projection device which could be used to show lantern slides produced from Kodak negatives, offered users the option of living "Kodak days in the open with Kodiopticon evenings in the home."<sup>23</sup> This was early evidence of

projection in domestic enclaves, and the ongoing promise of the image's ability to allow for the reliving of cherished moments. "Expressions" of the home in its architectural and decorative splendor, especially as improved film stocks, flash papers, and later flashlights became available, not only singled out the home as an image source, but also demonstrated the diversification of image making and its consumption in the domestic space, and the strengthening of a visual culture therein.

As popular use of the camera intensified so did the discourses espousing its historical function and indispensability as marker of time, and "impartial historian." "Kodak pictures will settle controversies as to how we did look," boasted one contributor to *Kodakery*, adding that with the Ciné-Kodak the records would become even more realistic. (Ellery, 1925, p. 18) Discourses of verisimilitude, the historical value of the image, and the utopian function of image making in the family as an all-inclusive activity and "moveable feast" were transferred to the production of moving images in the family. A longing for the future matched with the visual ownership of time past, and the willful claim to its narratives were reinforced as the family image archive grew. Of course the producers of photographic paraphernalia shared big stakes in this memory game, George Eastman for one having financed the construction of a mansion and a healthy philanthropic portfolio on other people's memories. What had entered the social and cultural landscape as popular leisure in 1888 had become, for those with the resources to do so, a familial historical imperative in which the perpetuity of the image reproduced desires to juxtapose "then" and "now."

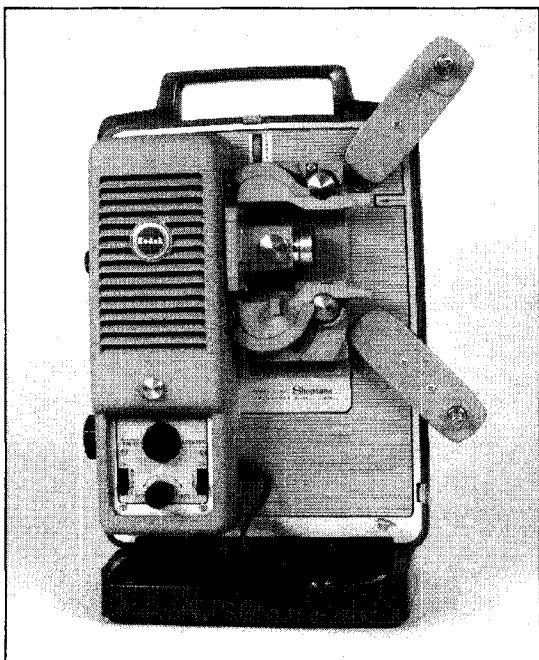
### Making "Movies"

When 16mm cameras were introduced in 1923, the necessity for exciting any new image making interests in the family was by no means contingent upon technology, and perhaps even less so was it the umbilical cord cut from professional film practice. That is, the precedents for a "historical consciousness" *vis-à-vis* image making and family documentation had already been anticipated. Home movie making practices glided alongside. Home movie making advice and literature continued to bracket

family events, children, holidays and travel as ripe for film production and image consumption throughout the fifties and beyond. Movie making literature also attempted to incite in amateur film makers the desire to film subject matter outside the scope of so-called social realist depictions of family life; creatively invested amateur / family movie makers not unlike photographers could also develop into long-term producers and consumers of images, and, more importantly, consumers of accessories. Personal film libraries and film humidors functioned much like the family album: image depositories for family memorabilia, as well as collections of professionally-made films purchased through film clubs and libraries. A conservation imperative reared its head in the discourse around family film / memory conservation in much the same way as photography. "For the beauty and refinement of the living room," pseudo, leather-bound book units aptly disguised film files, and at the same time hinted at the potential textuality of moving images, not unlike the photo album's textual consolidation of photographic images into leather-bound books of days, months, and years.

What Zimmermann distinguishes as a divisive move on the part of cinema professionals and experts to corral amateur practice, had, with respect to home movie making, already settled into routinized family practices of social realist documentation across generations and gender. The well-advertized imperatives to conserve and store film reels as if they were books imagined the incorporation of films into the family library and family history, as was the case with photo albums. These family film conservation practices proffered distinct temporal and spatial effects. While not apt to change existing attitudes toward family image production, consumption, and conservation, home movie discourses were certainly poised to nuance them.

Spatially, home movie making discourses continued to set up the home as a viable production venue and as a venue for the consumption of images, something that photographic discourses had already shaped with the idea of the home as both site and content of production, its walls and furniture surfaces the sites of consumption and display. The home movie took this one step further by anticipating the home as a moving image (and even-



### **Un projecteur Kodak**

Collection Cinémathèque québécoise

tually sound and moving image) entertainment centre.<sup>24</sup> As early as the 1920s and 1930s, *Ciné-Kodak Salesman* advised retailers to design in-store projection rooms / mock living rooms for silent screenings in order to lure prospective customers. Meanwhile, Bell & Howell compared their line of “[...] motion picture console cabinets,” to “[...] the finer radio and phonograph consoles” available at the time.<sup>25</sup> “Why should we make it more difficult to flick on the projector than the radio or TV set?,” asked *Popular Photography*’s Leendert Drucker (p. 119) in 1963 in a response to his own anxiety over the “ever-readiness” of the hi-fi. By the early- to mid-1960s, home movie making did not reap the same popularity as it had in the decade previous. To breathe life into this waning family activity in the 1960s, the Keystone Camera Company attempted to sell consumers on the instantaneity of home movie viewing by promising that with their self-threading projector and table-top monitor, movie viewing would be as “easy as watching TV.”<sup>26</sup>



The home movie, not unlike the photo album, marshaled a family historical imperative wherein reels everlasting could represent for friends and family the select aspects of family history in movement, and not surprisingly the more edited versions of family history: weddings, parties, high holidays, birthdays, vacations, and children. Countless advertisements for home movie making equipment from the 1920s and well into the 1950s, when movie cameras were in their widest popular use in North American families, vaunted claims regarding the necessity for marking time, for capturing family members in moving action before such precious moments and family members passed away, for indeed any moment could and would be history, moving picture history. The photographic image, still and moving, if not a means by which to beat the clock, might certainly have been able to compensate for its cruel lashes. Such a desire for history, personal history, and a deed to individualizing the past created an excitement around the home movie more so than any dreamworld of ersatz Hollywood production ever could.

Different from the photograph, however, the moving image presented the opportunity for the narration of family moments. Likewise, it roused the potential to dramatize even the most mundane of family activities, keeping in mind that there were distinctions made between “social realist” types of production (filming yard work, the children at play, opening Christmas gifts), and differently creative narration (fictional characters, costumes, scripts). Movie making columns and magazines from the 1920s well into the 1960s were big on offering narrative strategies for their readers, and would publish narrative contributions from readers as a means by which to set up a communicative space between active and potential family movie makers, and those of varying degrees of skill and interest. Different from photography in the home in which “realist” depiction ruled the literature, movie making advice attempted to inculcate amateur movie makers into regular practices of scripted histrionics, and also to sway them away from undisciplined camera use. (see Zimmermann) Journals such as *Movie Makers*, *Home Movies*, *Popular Photography* (Chicago), *Filmo Topics* (Bell & Howell), *Ciné-Kodak News* (Eastman Kodak), and *Parents Magazine*

intervened as creative brokers in moving image production. With the exception of *Parents*, which advised parents about the trials and tribulations of raising children, these journals catered to a diverse range of movie making interests: from amateurs interested in exploring film making beyond the subject matter of the family, to those for whom making movies meant concentrating on the family, both in terms of creative production and keeping family records. For this latter category of producers the single most important reason for having a camera would have been to chronicle the children, and not to aspire to great film making, despite the instructional discourses which punctuated narrative and narration as goals of amateur and family movie making.

Taking family pictures and making family movies could only cavalierly be construed as authentic responses to the industry's suggestive campaigns. Perhaps more accurately, family production was realized in the cross-fertilization of industry prodding in the form of publicity, instruction and magazine discourses, and the amateur practices themselves which over time and across family generations established their own codes for production. Lesley Johnson, on early Australian radio and the magazine literature which circulated about it, has argued that the role of magazine literature and letters-to-the-editor was not to provide an authentic indication of listener response, but to "close the circle: "

[Letters to the editor] supplemented the publicity language working to produce a powerful sense of - an "as if" - listeners, broadcasters and families of radio serials who [sic] all shared the same orientation - of the "human," the everyday-ordinary and the centrality of family. (p. 100)

Likewise, the literature and advice which grew up around family photography and movie making practices also "closed the circle." In this "closing," home movie discourses extended family photographic subject matter into the production of moving images in the family. Yesterday's snapshooters would become tomorrow's home movie makers. For as much as home movie instruction and promotion drew upon the popular imagery of

Hollywood and later television, its motors with respect to family production were memory and nostalgia, and a belief in the personal and historical necessities for capturing day to day life. This was never more pronounced than during the postwar period when “making up for lost time,” in terms of both the consumption of image making materials and the reunification of families, was configured in photography / film journals and publicity as a collective necessity. It is not completely unfounded, then, that the imagined and practical uses of photographic cameras would reproduce themselves in literature and practice with respect to moving image cameras. Family movie making culminated in what had already existed as a popular social and cultural practice of recording family history, and of interpreting family history in images. We could think of this “will to history” in terms of the relentless interpellation of the family as producer and consumer by the photographic and film materials industry; however, this would award far too much credit to the suppliers and manufacturers of this equipment. The image making industry did not invent a personal historical imperative; however, it did insinuate itself on the bourgeois nuclear family’s desire for one.

In the 1950s, Roy Pinney (*Parents Magazine*) wrote endlessly about narrative opportunities which could be met around every corner by homemaker / moms with time on their hands, whose mothers and grandmothers were quite possibly the virtuous ladies of leisure and home photography of the turn of the century. Pinney’s image making opportunities often involved labour-intensive planning and shooting to turn a day in the life of baby into a series of engaging events. (p. 146) The kids at play tracking mud through the kitchen, father’s arrival after work, and the children madly rushing to meet him at the door (filmed first with noses pressed against the picture window) are proof that even the most mundane of domestic activities could be potential narrative compositions, and that the domestic labourer should incorporate into her duties the documentation of child’s play. *Popular Photography* contributor, Helen Ainsworth, advised that homemakers could keep themselves busy at home by filming the children at play, or their husbands on the golf course.<sup>27</sup> “Take a

Kodak with you,” one of the company slogans at the turn of the century, could very well have been changed to “keep a Kodak with you,” for the 1950s homemaker/mother, and indeed echoed the “keep it ready, keep it loaded” advice of *Kodakery* staff writer, Madge Ellery. (1929, p. 13) Hardly exclusive to home movie making practices, these narrative suggestions transcended the moving image and extended back in time to give a nod to earlier family photographic imperatives, as well as to confirm women’s eternal appointment as domestic labourers / keepers of family history.

Christmas records, the kids playing at home, birthdays, and vacations — still and moving image — all emphasized the repetition of personal time in the recurring march of public time. While the movie camera appeared to set in motion what the photographic camera could only capture in a fraction of a movement, its intervention in the family did little to radically change the representation of family history. The moving image camera, however, did affect the consumption of family history, a matter intensified by home videos and their publicity on syndicated programs like the contemporary “America’s Funniest Home Videos.”

The family in this slice of image making history has been conceived of as a precious constant, which points more to how technologies have been disseminated to families and the domestic scene than to the nature of families themselves. Likewise, discourses around image making in the family, ironically, shaped it into a timeless practice, but one with overtly temporal concerns. While wrongheaded to argue that film is the linear extension of photography, the quality of this statement changes with respect to the appropriation of these practices, their production and consumption in the family in history. It is such consistency which is most interesting and not wholly nor independently explainable in terms of either symbolic behaviour, or industry influence. From this perspective, home movie making is less the failed emulation of film making professionalism, and more the culmination of a desire for memory and a longing for family history in images meshed together with the personalization of temporal experience, and the increasing privatization of spectatorship.

However creatively and aesthetically crafted, home movies are, more poignantly, relics of family history. Ideas about professionalism in film making quite possibly influenced the production of moving images in some families, but by no means was this the norm. The more challenging matter, as I have attempted to chip away at here, has not been to ascertain how professional film practices and discourse attempted to inform home movie production (which may after all have just been a promotional ploy), but to understand how a distinct visual culture established itself in the home and family, and how the family realized and edited its own history in terms of the image. The codes for family movie production, and this is the crux of the matter, preceded the popularization of film in the family. They were anticipated, as I have argued, by the popularization of photographic practices in the family vis-à-vis their entrenchment as technologies which could be used to document and, in fact, could be used to reconfigure the representation of family history. Discourses of professional film production did attempt to colonize the production of home movies, but nowhere is the significance of these reels more pronounced than in the interstices of memory and history, select family history, something that the appropriation of photography in the family pushed forth. The home in this narrative, while not uniquely the site of production, most certainly became the site of image consumption, an archival nerve centre for family past-looking.

As a postscript, I recently sat down with my family, four generations in all, to participate in past-looking. We viewed our family films (1957-1968) which were recently transferred to video. Some family members had long since passed away; some events had been completely forgotten, while others bore no recollection at all, their production significance having escaped their longevity as moments on a reel of film. This all seemed to defy the importance of the image and drew attention to the limitations of memory, no thanks to the image, a matter which made my mind wander to 1920s' home movie publicity discourse about the memorial potency of images. Watching these privileged "moments" of family history drove home just how much their production was not about film making, nor was our

consumption of them predicated on simulating any cinematic experience. Even the most stirring pans of desolate 1950s North American city and landscapes could not quell the expression of a parental longing for more images of the children: the persistent infantilization of family history and the promise of the future trapped in the past. Just what that experience of viewing was I can not quite put into words, but it did make us all want to make and consume more images. We never were “in the movies,” but as this family viewing well showed, the movies, home movies that is, are in us.

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#### NOTES

1 This paper is drawn from my doctoral dissertation, “Taking Pictures, Making Movies, and Telling Time: Charting the Development of a Producing and Consuming Visual Culture in the Family,” Graduate Program in Communications, McGill University, forthcoming.

2 This latter point is discussed in Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

3 The case study in this paper focuses exclusively on Eastman Kodak precisely because the company is the first to simplify image making processes for the widest popular use. Second, Eastman Kodak is the first to introduce a line of standardized amateur film making equipment (16mm) in North America, followed very soon after by Bell & Howell. Both companies were members of the Motion Picture Patents Company and worked together to develop amateur film.

4 See for example Richard Chalfen *Snapshot Versions of Life* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987); Christopher Musello, “Studying the Home Mode: An Exploration of Family Photography and Visual Communications,” *Studies in Visual Communication*, vol. 6, n° 1 (1980), p. 23-42.

5 In 1924, the Ciné-Kodak outfit (camera, tripod, projector, splicer, and screen) was sold for \$ 335 in the United States, a considerable amount of money. See Brian Coe, *The History of Movie Photography*. Westfield (New Jersey: Eastview Editions, 1981, p. 167). In 1953, the Kodak Brownie (Kodak's bottom of the line model) retailed for approximately \$ 43 in the United States (Eastman Kodak advertizing copy, *Popular Photography*, volume 32, n° 3). In 1951, the average yearly income for a Canadian household was \$ 2 367 (*Census of Canada*, 1951, Table 1, p. 1). Keeping in mind that product lines and prices varied based on gadgetry, the Brownie represented approximately one-quarter of a Canadian monthly income, more or less depending on Canadian retail prices. Needless to say, the costs of this equipment were prohibitive.

6 With the exception of the period between bracketed by 1923 and 1932, 16mm had always appeared as a format associated with the committed hobbyist, and with respect to this period families who had a considerable amount of money to spend on such gadgets. 16mm film had wide applications to educational and training film production prior to the postwar period, and very early on was diversified beyond travel

and family films. A utopian and educational discourse pervades the most popular and worldly available of amateur movie making journals, *Movie Makers* (the journal of the Amateur Cinema League) from its introduction in 1926. The proliferation of film libraries in the twenties with circulation in Canada as well as the United States (Kodascope Libraries (Eastman Kodak), Filmo Library (Bell & Howell) Empire Films, Home Film Libraries, Neighbourhood Film Libraries), whose catalogues included an abundance of educational titles, indicates how 16mm was poised for educational and training film (public service) purposes. Louis M. Bailey, regular columnist for *Movie Makers*, wrote frequently about the use of film for educational purposes; for example, "The Movies Win for Welding," *Movie Makers*, vol. 4, n° 3 (1929); "News of Visual Education in Schools and Homes," *Movie Makers*, vol. 4, n° 5 (1929); "Forward with Medical Films," *Movie Makers*, vol. 4, n° 10 (1929), to name a few.

7 There are, however, exceptions. Please see Jonas Mekas, *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-71* (New York: Collier Books, 1972). In this collection of Mekas's articles, he discusses the Kuchar brothers' interests in 8mm film ("Kuchar 8mm Manifesto") and Stan Brakhage's acclaimed and experimental use of 8mm to produce his family's home movies ("Brakhage Buys 8mm Camera").

8 The advertising copy for the new Ciné-Kodak 8 begins: "This has nothing to do with hard times... nothing to do with depression prices or depression thinking." See "Ciné-Kodak Salesman Advertizing Insert," *The Ciné-Kodak Salesman*, vol. 2, n° 8 (1932), p. 3.

9 See Jean-Louis Comolli, "Machines of the Visible," in Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (eds), *The Cinematic Apparatus* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980).

10 See Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), especially the chapter one entitled "The Nature of Time."

11 See *Cycle and Camera* (London: Robert L. Jefferson and Walter D. Welford. First Edition, May 22, 1897). See also Jay Ruby, "The Wheelman and the Snap-shooter or, the Industrialization of the Picturesque", in Kathleen Collins (ed.), *Shadow and Substance: Essays on the History of Photography* (Bloomfield Hills, Michigan: The Amorphous Institute Press, 1990). Even George Eastman was said to have been an avid cyclist. See Elizabeth Brayer, *George Eastman: A Biography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

12 See *Cycle and Camera*, vol. 1, n° 13 (August 14, 1897), p. 393.

13 See for example, D. J. Tapley, *The New Recreation, Amateur Photography: A Practical Instructor* (New York: Husrst & Co., 1884); Diane Galusha and Karen Marshall, *Through a Woman's Eye: Pioneering Photographers in Rural Upstate* (Hensonville, NY: Black Dome Press Corp, 1994); Jane C. Gover, *The Positive Image: Women Photographers in Turn of the Century America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Madelyn Moeller, "Ladies of Leisure: Domestic Photography in the Nineteenth Century," in Kathryn Grover (ed.), *Hard at Play: Leisure in America 1840-1940* (Amherst, MA and Rochester, NY: The University of Massachusetts Press and The Strong Museum, 1992, p. 139-160).

14 See "The Present Aspect of Amateur Photography," *The American Amateur Photographer*, vol. 1, n° 1 (1889), p. 5.

15 There are several corporate name changes here. The Eastman Kodak Company wasn't the official company name until 1892. Prior to this time the company did business under the names The Eastman Company (1889), The Eastman Dry Plate and Film Company (1884), and The Eastman Dry Plate Company (1881). For all intents and purposes the paper uses the 1892 name, by which we know the company today.

16 See the letter of George Eastman (GE) to C. W. Sumner, August 15, 1888, *George Eastman Correspondence (GEC)*, George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film, Rochester, New York.

17 This design was for *Harpers Bazaar*. GE to C.K. Darrow & Brothers, October 17, 1888 (GEC). This is also the likely origin of Kodak Girl, the title given to a succession of models who promoted Kodak products from the 1890s up until the 1960s.

18 To Frank Brownell, the inventor of the Kodak Brownie, colleague and good friend, Eastman wrote: "You will perhaps recollect that when we were working on the first models of the Kodak that I told you that I proposed with that instrument to change the very name of photography. A perusal of the accompanying book (Mrs. Collis' Alaska) will show you that this prophesy if not already fulfilled is in a fair way to be. When the writer of such a book entirely unknown to us says she 'Kodaked' a subject in the preference to 'photographed' it, it shows that the word has got in its work." (GE to Brownell, January 15, 1891, GEC).

19 The Brownie was not a derivative of inventor Frank Brownell's name.

20 Palmer Cox, an ex-patriot Canadian living and working in the United States until his retirement and return to his birthplace, Granby, Ontario, published numerous books chronicling the adventures of his impish characters. Cox's Brownies were always involved in contemporary activities and had individualized personas, which likely contributed to making him one of the most popular writers for children in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Aside from publishing books, Cox's illustrated narratives appeared as a standard feature in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, a regular carrier of Eastman Kodak advertisements. On Palmer Cox, see *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 42, p. 133-138.

21 This pledge in the form of a corporate mantra first appeared in *Kodak Trade Circular* (which was amalgamated with *Kodak Salesman* in 1930), vol. 1, n° 6 (May, 1900).

22 See "They Say: Eminent People Applaud the Anniversary Plan," *The Kodak Salesman*, vol. 16, n° 3, p. 11.

23 Eastman Kodak advertizing copy from *Kodakery*, vol. 1, n° 5 (1914).

24 Interestingly, amateur movie discourse of the 1920s and 1930s considered any movie shown in the home to be a home movie. In other words, films rented from film libraries and those made in the family and viewed there, although differentiated from each other, were all considered home movies by virtue of their viewing location in the domestic space; it was not until the postwar and 1950s that the term "home movies" exclusively referred to family documents and memoirs.

25 See "News of the Industry," *Movie Makers*, vol. 3, n° 8 (1928), p. 536.

26 See *Popular Photography*, vol. 54, n° 4 (1964), p. 47.

27 See Helen Ainsworth, "For Women Only," *Popular Photography*, vol. 40, n° 3 (1957).

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