Melinda Blos-Jáni

Home Movies as Everyday Media Histories : Approaching Home Made Imagery in the Age of New Media

MUZEUM HISTORII POLSKI

Melinda Blos-Jáni

(Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania)

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With the large-scale spread of amateur technologies at the beginning of the twentieth century (such as Ernemann Heimkino, Cine Kodak or Pathé Baby[1]), the media of photography and film has also allowed everyday people to record their own stories. In the age of new media (or post media), moving pictures have infiltrated more and more the lives of home movie makers. These media practices have not just influenced life-worlds; filming has also become part of the strategies of everyday life and this communicative posture has redefined attitude to the past and to time in general[2]. The purpose of this paper is to use the concept of the medium as a tool for social history. I have found that the key to the emic perspective of everyday (media) history and to the understanding of film-making practices lies in a concept which does not make a hierarchical distinction between the history of media and the study of socio-cultural contexts. Our everyday media life[3] (and our everyday home movie) bears the traces of social and technological history and, as such, refers to objects, knowledge, practice and attitudes inherited from a culture already past, and passed on by informal means.

An everyday media history? Research perspectives.

Private film makers continue the line of the ancient cultural activity of observation, recording and contemplation: "home movies, also known as amateur films or private films, are the continuation of the tradition of the bourgeois family portrait gallery, in former times painted, and from the last century recorded on photographs"[4]. This quotation is suitable to introduce the topic of this paper from several points of view. Péter Forgács formulates an idea which has become the cornerstone of contemporary theories of media culture: new media build on older ones, that is to say, they function as a kind of media history archive and carry in themselves their own genealogy. In this conceptual framework, the use of pictures at the beginning of the twentieth century is connected to the present use of pictures: since the remediation of media is not a new phenomenon, it offers a research direction and theoretical framework in which picture-making practices, that are far from each other in time, can be interpreted in their historicity. However, the

term 'private film', gradually becoming out-dated[5], draws attention to the changing demands of film makers towards pictures in the new media age: to the changes regarding the social conventions of media practices.

The author of this paper has experienced this change herself during fieldwork and research: during her research for her BA thesis defended in 2003, she analysed the video recordings of a family, stored on VHS tapes, in the context of "their home", namely a film collection that can be regarded as a population of objects that was produced and viewed in a close family circle and in a well-defined space (family home). Private filmmaking once signified economic status and the privilege of technical knowledge. Furthermore, objects could be stored in boxes and later on VHS tapes, or could be offered as gifts and projected at special occasions, but nowadays anyone can become a filmmaker with a camera or telephone at hand. During her latest 2011 research in 2011, the author could also analyse situations in which family members stored their digital video recordings on different media, and made them public on different web interfaces, accompanied by photographs and texts. Thus, the changed contexts of everyday filmmaking/video watching and the new constellations of coexistence with media and technologies could both be observed.

In the initial phase of the research it seemed that the process of popularization of moving images, the social conventions and cultural functions of their use had already been accounted for[6]. However, the changing media age puts these questions on the agenda again, one might as well say that the researcher is in the lucky position in which he/she can observe the characteristics of changing media, as well as the dynamics of everyday life and technologies. In the new media age questions relating to the anthropological aspects of the use of moving images become relevant again. How can one describe the communication attained through private filmmaking? Who are the people that make up the filmmaking community, and what kind of role distribution takes place during filming? Which are the things that "must" be filmed? What kinds of expectations are there regarding the contents and rendering of images? What happens with the recordings after they are made? What kind of technicization[7] characterizes communities that make films? In addition, how do generations socialised on "old media" switch to a new kind of practice, and how does that differ from the practices of others growing up in a different media age? How can the archiving tendency of the new media age be connected to the archiving urge that can generally be found in moving images (and in private films as well)[8] and with the endeavours to record and conserve time? Along the line of such questions one can outline the logic of the usage of moving images established in everyday thinking, and according to the given scale (the selected communities) in a given time frame.

It is challenging to study the private use of moving images in another respect too: the contemporary discourses of media history and theory emphasize that, contrarily to technical determinism, media history and theory have been shaped by social needs. In this premise the history of technology and media cannot be separated

from social history. Researchers tackling historical and theoretical questions, are in fact social historians, and at the same time anthropologists of media practices also explore a certain knowledge connected to media history(ies) and theory(ies). The author of this paper wishes to follow the latter line of inquiry and examine the kind of media histories that are outlined and the kind of media theories that are revealed by everyday practices as compared to the big media histories and theories. The reason for which historicity is emphasized here is because private films are not embedded in the life of individuals only, but also in everyday life, in the history of representational forms and in macro contexts. Thus, even research examining present-day filming habits will accomplish only a snapshot and will become a historical document.

The analysis of moving images in symbiosis with their environment and time has a twofold perspective in the present paper. It is challenging to examine what can be deciphered from private films, namely from the practice of mediatisation of everyday life, about those life-worlds that become observable on these films and through these films. Many generations have grown up with camera lenses directed towards them, and, from time to time, various amounts of photographs and films have been accumulated throughout their lives. These private photographs and films have reflected/influenced lifestyles, relationships, the culture of remembrance, identity, as well as material and visual culture. In some cases these visual representations render national, individual or group identity. In close connection to this, I am also interested in representations of moving images that come into existence in everyday thinking, and meanings of the moving image (as an artefact) that are developed.

Moving images can find their place and become embedded in the fabric of everyday life in different forms, that is to say that the social life of films can evolve in different ways depending on their context. A group of hikers, a village, fellows of a class or a working community, an informal gathering can occasionally become a mnemonic community, in which visual memorabilia may be forgotten, exhausted in one-off watching, or may be transferred to other private or official archives. The family is a filmmaking and film consuming community that preserves and archives documents, objects and visual products belonging to it. The joint influence of all these factors led to the decision to examine the ways in which families use moving images.

The family is a social unit, a community within which one can examine the ways private filming becomes embedded in life-worlds and affects them. In this context attitudes towards filming and generational differences can be studied, and one can compare the adaptation of family members socialised on various media to the new media age. In connection to family life and to the universe of the "home" it is a relevant observation that the child's arrival into the family and becoming a parent is an event that can also be considered a pictorial turn. Home movies from different periods constitute convincing evidence that this turning point in the family life is interconnected with the disposition for taking photographs and filmmaking, and as such can function as a resource for family and media history.

Towards a methodological framework: home movies/videos as the nomads of media history

The subtitle references Hans Belting's differentiation between image and medium: "images are neither on the wall (or on the screen) nor in the head alone. They happen via transmission and perception (…) A medium *is* form, or it transmits the very form in which we perceive images. But mediality equally cannot be reduced to technology. Media use symbolic techniques through which they transmit images and imprint them on the collective memory. The politics of images relies on their mediality, and not on their technique"[8]. In his writings, the art historian and media theorist is preoccupied rather with the images that in his view resist linear histories: "images resemble nomads in the sense that they take residence in one medium after another. (…) Images may be old even when they resurface in new media. We also know that they age in ways different from the aging of media. The media are usually expected to be new, while images keep their life when they are old and when they return in the midst of new media"[9]. In this perspective, the migration of images from medium to medium takes place at the junction of collective imagination and of visual technologies. This differentiation or duality is also present in the theories of new media.

If images are made visible and transmitted to the social space by media, it is necessary to examine how film functions as a medium in the case of home movies/videos. When looking at the history of home movies, the question multiplies. Image recording technologies, amateur film techniques and image formats have their own history that are also shaped by social needs. The image making practices, the media literacy of generations and the story of a technology becoming medium are age-specific as well. The media practices of the home movie makers differ from the habitus of the former generation: the habits and routines interiorized in childhood will change together with the media- and family histories. Consequently, when we digitalize a celluloid film in fact we do more than just change the receiving vessel. A medium is more than a container of the images: pictures are historically stratified objects and human relationships as well (as they also mediate certain norms and decisions written into its material by other people).

In affiliation with media narratology, *media genealogy* has elaborated an interpretative model for grasping the processes of media history. This new approach conceived by André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion studies the genealogy of media in their dynamics. Consequently, the concept of the "date of birth" of a medium is revised: instead of looking for first appearances, it investigates the identity processes followed by different media (understood in the sense suggested by Paul Ricoeur) because: "when a medium appears, an intelligible media culture already exists"[10]. The moment of appearance of a new technology can be dated, but the constitution of a medium can be a long process, as demonstrated through the example of the cinema and regarded prototypical by the authors: "the film medium could be said to have been born twice. The first birth is when a new technology is used to extend earlier media practices. The second birth is when it acquires an in-

stitutional legitimacy that acknowledges their specificity"[11]. This path is a gradated process of three moments: the *appearance* of a technology, the *emergence* of an initial media culture and the *constitution* of the institutionalized media[12]. Thus, a new medium finds its 'identity' gradually, and becomes engaged with a wide range of existing media/media practices, it exists in interconnectedness, in an intermedial culture until its establishment as a unique medium or a specific practice.

While looking at identity processes of the early cinema, André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion establish a new model for the research of media history: "a good understanding of a medium thus entails understanding its relationship to other media: it is through intermediality, through a concern with the intermedial, that a medium is understood"[13]. Thus, when a new technology appears, the first birth is characterized by a spontaneous intermediality, which turns into a negotiated intermediality in the phase of the second birth or institutional recognition[14].

The concept of a negotiated intermediality might be useful in understanding the contemporary media culture, often described as hybridity, boundary-crossing or in-betweenness[15]. Moreover the radical changes of the medial eco-system were considered a caesura, a mark of a new era (as suggested by terms such as new media or post-media). This new age of intermediality or hybridity was interpreted as a kind of dilution, which led to the shrinking of the medium[16], and concurrently as a continuous shift of medial forms, a kind of intensified intermedial condition. From this perspective, the genealogy of the increasingly domesticated cinematic medium might be relevant in the research of the dissemination of the chameleon-like media as well.

Moreover, the media genealogy of the increasingly familiar (home) movie can be analysed in parallel with the genealogy of families, as suggested by James Moran: "[media] are themselves mediated by notions of family: while we use these media audiovisually to represent family relations to ourselves, we also use family relations discursively to represent these media to each other"[17]. Furthermore, home movies represent a type of externalized genealogical memory which mediates the genealogy of a family in a complex manner: these recordings are the imprints of the intentions and attitudes of the filmmaker and his generation, and in the same time of each generation that preserves and views them, and they update their meanings according to their needs. Thus, the analysis of home-made imagery makes visible the genealogy of a family, the functioning of the genealogical memory and the genealogy of media adopted to portray everyday life.

The *theory of remediation*[18] also models the interdependence of media within the framework of communication theory. While media genealogy studies the changing identity of media, the theory of remediation examines the interdependence of media, as a medium that is never isolated, it exist in relationships of respect and rivalry with other media: "a medium is that which remediates"[19]. Thus the identity of old media is challenged, it needs to be refashioned and its status reaffirmed. Compared to media genealogy, this approach is not destined to deal with social

practices (although it is based on theories of culture), in turn it discusses more thoroughly how a medium can be present in another medium. The logic of remediation is presented in the context of its history: remediation is not a "universal aesthetic truth, rather we regard them as practices of specific groups in specific times"[20]. Accordingly, the novelty of new media lies in its specific procedures of remediation. The notion of history used by Bolter–Grusin is affiliated to the notion of media genealogy. They depart from Foucault's notion of genealogy, and they are not concerned with issues of origin, but rather with the circumstances resulting in formal relations within and among media.

Remediation is best described using the double logic of immediacy and hypermediacy: "our culture wants to both multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation"[21]. Remediation can be relevant from the viewpoint of home movies/videos especially when it reflects on the relation between media and reality: all mediation is real (not a simulation) and the end-products are real as artefacts: "media have the same claim to reality as more tangible cultural artefacts; photographs, films and computer applications are as real as airplanes and buildings[22]. Since the act of mediation is part of reality, therefore mediation remediates the real.

Bolter and Grusin dedicate a whole chapter to the social dimensions of remediation. According to them the appeal of immediacy, opacity and hypermediacy is socially determined: "for it is clear that not only individuals, but also various social groups can vary in their definitions of the authentic. What seems immediate to one group is highly mediated to another. In our culture, children may interpret cartoons and picture books under the logic of transparent immediacy, while adults will not"[23]. Thus, we can also examine remediation as a social phenomenon as well, with historically changing aspects (see media genealogy).

How does the medium shape the life of the individual or the society? When posing this question one has to consider that the medium does not convey only images but it can also convey as part of reality certain norms and decisions recorded and written by other people. At the same time, mediums are objects and solidified human relationships as well, that is, they convey human relationships, as sociologists of knowledge suggest[24]. The study of family movies may uncover histories of human relationships.

Home movies by definition are as distinct from the use of moving images in institutions such as the cinema, as they are parts and shapers of family home space. If we want to find out the meaning of moving images that has developed in family home space and reality, we will find the domestication of objects and technologies relevant, too. The researchers of *media domestication* study the process in which information and communication technologies become part of the intimate space of the home and household: what the reasons are behind the purchase of certain technologies and what ways they are tuned in to the home environment and woven into the fabric of everyday life. What kind of power relations do they create? As Roger Silverstone puts it, the interaction of humans and technologies has consequences

for both sides: "wild animals then, wild technologies now, what's the difference? In both cases, unconstrained, they pose threats and challenges. In both cases, brought within the fold, they become sources of power and sustenance. Domestication is practice. It involves human agency. It requires effort and culture, and it leaves nothing as it is"[25].

Domestication, therefore, is a process where man and technology meet, thus, making many 'things' part of the home life: appliances, ideas, values, and information. Similar to the theory of social representations that investigates the ways in which formalized knowledge becomes informal, the theory of domestication links up the macro- and micro-levels[26] of society. We can distinguish between two tactics of domestication: in a household, technology undergoes a process of *objectification*, becoming a part of the group of objects and creating a space for itself. At the same time, it is *incorporated* into the network of human relationships and the temporal dimension of family life[27]. Therefore, upon acquisition, the meaning of technology is transformed, it becomes part of the material and the symbolic sphere of our homes.[28] In the case of communication technologies,[29] these transformations are multiplied, as the act of mediation – which can again create contact between the private and public spheres – also needs to be considered.

The starting point of the theory of domestication is that 'taming' technologies implies a series of synchronizations: technical, cultural, economic, and social. Relevant references also claim that the handling of these technologies has its own genealogy: new devices are embedded into the already existing family or professional practices and routines[30]. What type of realities and media practices is moving image technology shaped to? How is a technology discovered, and what is curiosity driven by? What are their stories of accessibility and acquisition? How does a certain device become personal and familiar? How have the changing technologies of moving images shaped the private use and the concept of media? It is the concept of domestication that may help us get closer to the context of home movies, and enter into a conversation about its use, the everyday routines, and its embedded nature at the level of the family micro-communities[31]. Furthermore, such questions can guide the description of the intermedial relations of home movies, as suggested by the theories of media genealogy and remediation presented above.

Conclusions

This paper intended to build a methodological framework for the research of the nomadic behaviour of home made images in the new media age. While the practice of home movies was theorised in the age of the celluloid film and nuclear family, the refinement of these approaches occurred at the beginning of the 1990s, with the emergence of video technology. However, the literature of the new media reported the turning point-like changes of the habitus of amateur films: the home movie is just one of the amateur filmmaking habitus, neither more typical nor more representative than any other practices. The technological, social, and cul-

tural dimensions of the previous ritualised practice need to be re-evaluated in this context. What can we learn from the new media practices and theories about old media? Looking at the various research directions presented above I consider media genealogy to a theoretical framework which can hold together the collected data and films. The theory of media domestication, remediation, intermediality and convergence are concepts and at the same time media historical and social perspectives which can further refine the reflection on the practice of home movies.

Anthropologists know that one cannot study a segment of a culture without being familiar with the whole system of relationships within that culture. In the case of home movies, the way to represent these relationships is through a medium-concept, which does not make a hierarchical distinction between the history of the medium and its socio-cultural analysis. Through this concept of medium we can unfold a complex system of relationships. Among the collections of home movies pertaining to families, I have discovered a type of source that can help us investigate the history of both the media-shaping man and the user-shaping media.

Endnotes

[1] For a comprising history of amateur technologies, see the following study: Buckingham 2011. 7–28.

[2] Several attempts have been made to grasp the passage to the age of social media by the description of the functions of the new media. According to these, the function of mediated personal memory objects (also) changes in the new culture: the primacy of memory preservation and storage is taken over by the function of making contacts and identity construction, the practice of preservation and memory alternates and competes with the immediate sharing of experiences, as a performative mode. In her book *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (2007) José van Dijck analyses this transition, the shift of communication functions, starting from the example of three old media: the diary, the home photo, and the home film.

[3] As a result of the explosive dissemination of participatory culture, we have turned from media to social media (Manovich 2009. 319). Consequently, everyday life is filled up with media in such a way that the strategic thinking defining institutions and power structures has transformed into tactical thinking characteristic for the everyday life of individuals. Paraphrasing de Certeau: the practice of everyday life was replaced by the practice of everyday media life (Manovich 2009).

[4] P. Forgacs, *The Archeology of Home Movie, Our Life is a Language of Signs*, eds. A., E. Kapitany, Budapest 1995, pp.109-111.

[5] See my overview of media theories discussing home visual media (Blos-Jáni 2012).

[6] When the first anthropological analyses of home photos and movies appeared, the examination of representations was dominated by constructivist, semiotic approaches which concentrated on images as systems of symbols, as artefacts. According to the literature on home movies filmmaking is not merely a technological means used in a private context in communicative situations by the members of a 'speech community' (Hymes 1967). Anthropologist Richard Chalfen, raises similar questions: starting from Sol Worth's concept of symbolic environment and Nelson Goodman's constructivist philosophy, he understands the family collections of photos and movies as a construed world comprehensible by the analysis of the symbolic system underlying the content, form, and use of the pictures. The author is less interested in the pictures themselves, much rather in the communication achieved by them, namely the "home mode pictorial communication" (Chalfen 1987. 6–9). The French theoretician of home movies, Roger Odin, also applies Dell Hymes's communication theory, but he is not so much interested in communication forms within a family. In his semio-pragmatic approach he interprets the construction of a text starting from its pragmatics: he studies the modalities of film texts as they change in relation to context (Odin 2008). More recently James Moran suggests, that this

practice must be rethought as a mutual effect of technological, social, and cultural determinations, as a "liminal space in which practitioners may explore and negotiate the competing demands of their public, communal and private, personal identities" (Moran 2002. 60). Therefore, if one understands the practice of home filmmaking as a *habitus*, then the question of how and what is worth presenting in a home movie must be given multiple solutions: the dominant ideologies influencing the practice of home filmmaking, the changing family institutions and life-worlds, and the history of amateur recording should be analysed together (Moran 2002. 59–63).

[7] The starting point of the theory of domestication is that 'taming' technologies implies a series of synchronizations: technical, cultural, economic, and social. Relevant references also claim that the handling of these technologies has its own genealogy: new devices are embedded into the already existing family or professional practices and routines (Rieffel 2008. 215).

[8] Mary Ann Doane claims that the moving image appeared in an era characterized by a „strong archiving desire". Films fulfilled the desire of recording and archiving the contingent, the time of history (Doane 2002. 206-232).

[9] H. Belting, *Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology*, "Critical Inquiry" 2005, pp. 302.

[10] Ibidem, pp. 310.

[11] M. Gaudreault, P. Marion, *The Cinema as a Model for the Genealogy of Media*, "Convergence" 2002, vol. 8 (4), pp. 12.

[12] Ibidem, pp. 14.

[13] Ibidem, pp. 15.

[14] Ibidem, pp. 16.

[15] J.D. Bolter, R. Gruisin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Cambridge 1998; L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, Massachussets 2001; H. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York 2006.

[16] D. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*, Boston 2007.

[17] J. Moran, *There's no Place like Home Video*, Minnesota 2002, pp. 97.

[18] The term remediation is defined by Paul Levenson as the „antropotropic process by which new media technologies remedy prior technologies. Bolter–Grusin defines it differently, as „a formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms" (Bolter–Grusin 1999. 273).

[19] J.D. Bolter, op. cit., pp. 65.

[20] Ibidem, pp. 21.

[21] Ibidem, pp. 5.

[22] Ibidem, pp. 19.

[23] Ibidem. pp. 71.

[24] Our relationship to the world of objects is a type of social behavior, which affects individual identities just as much as communities or families do – argues Karin Knorr Cetina referencing Bruno Latour: „the argument I offer is that these object worlds need to be included in an expanded conception of sociality and of social relations" (Knorr Cetina 1997. 9). She suggests that objects should not be conceived of as instruments or symbols used, owned or exchanged by the members of the society, but rather as constituents of societies (actors).

[25] `R. Silverstone, *Media and Morality: on the Rise of the Mediapolis*, Wiley 2006, pp. 231.

[26] According to Roger Silverstone, throughout the process domestication macrostructures mobilize the material resources, cultural values and social competences of the members of the households (2006. 233).

[27] Ibidem, pp. 234-235.

[28] In the 2006 book entitled *Domestication of Media and Technology* the authors reflect upon the shifting notions of household, home and family. These categories have become relational: families are no longer consistent in practice, the boundaries of the home are breaking down, the difference between the inside and the outside is problematic (Silverstone 2006. 241–243). In this context the basis of the concept of domestication needs to be adjusted to the contemporary experience and practice.

Although it would be interesting to make statements about the ideas of family and domesticity under communism, as I have studied a singular family, not a typical one, this fact prevents me from doing so. Still, because the family in discussion is a classically structured nuclear family (which becomes geographically dispersed by the end of the era), it is justifiable to use the concept of domestication in the analysis.

[29] Although the examples analysed in this literature range from radio and computer to the world of mobile technology, these considerations focus on the equipment: they refuse the deterministic effects of technology, but they are not adequate to interpret the contents and the product. This is why this paper cannot make statements about the content and the changing visual language of home films, although this could be an important dimension as well.

[30] R. Rieffel 2008, pp. 215.

[31] In a recently published article I analyze the home movie making practice of a family's three generations departing from the theory of media domestication (see Blos-Jáni 2013).

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Home movies jako codzienne historie zmediatyzowane. Badanie obrazów powstałych w warunkach domowych w dobie nowych mediów

W swoim artykule autorka prezentuje koncept metodologiczny służący analizie prywatnych filmów (home movies). W oryginalny sposób łączy perspektywę genealogii mediów André Gaudreault i Philippe Marion, sięga po refleksję nad intermedialnością i konwergencją mediów, wykorzystuje też teorię remediacji i badania nad oswajaniem praktyk medialnych (media domestication researches). Perspektywa autorki, skoncentrowana na kategorii medium, pozwala jej w przekonujący sposób połączyć historię społeczną i historię technologii, badanie „historii mediów kształtujących człowieka i badanie użytkownika kształtującego medium".

Home Movies as Everyday Media Histories. Approaching Home Made Imagery in the Age of New Media

The author presents methodological concept devoted to studies of home movies. She combines in an original way broad range of discourses. For example she utilizes André Gaudreault's and Philippe Marion's studies on the genealogy of media, the concept of intermediality, media convergence, theory of remediation and researches on media domestication. This medium-focused perspective convincingly links together social and technological history – studies on "the history of the media-shaping man and the user-shaping media".