

Annie Schweikert

Introduction to MIAP

Prof. Howard Besser and Juana Suárez

15 December 2017

**“It’s not a discussion, it’s just happening”:**

**Home movies and home video in the archives**

Home movies and home videos occupy distinctly separate zones in the literature of moving image archiving. The former set of moving image materials is addressed at length with a definitive vocabulary of aesthetics, technical, and temporal concerns; the latter materials are often dealt with incidentally in the course of discussions of technology, or as they differ from home movies. Even as home movies enter the formal collecting scope of more and more institutions, and as home-grown efforts such as Home Movie Day bring together archivists, creators, and aficionados, there persists a fundamental perceptual divide between home movies and home videos. Why is this split taken for granted, when the content is ostensibly so similar? What practical and conceptual consequences does the film-to-video format shift have in archives that collect home movies? And, ultimately, how can a study of the film/analog video divide begin to inform archival treatment and conceptualization of digital home videos?

This paper will explore the shifts in archival practice surrounding domestically-produced content across different carriers. It is clear that accessioning analog video places real demands on staff time and finances that are especially consequential for small, cash-strapped archives. But accessioning analog video is also the easiest way to fulfill a regional archive’s calling to

documenting community history, as it ensures diversity of race, class, and time period. This paper cannot resolve the inherent tension between these practical consequences and institutional missions. It also recognizes the enormous work these archives have already done in the service of community and regional memory. However, it suggests that there is a value to home video, perhaps underestimated, that archives should weigh carefully against the perceived practical difficulties of its collection.

### **A brief history of the home mode**

Before entering on a discussion of the home mode, some definitions are necessary. In this paper, the term “home mode” is used after Richard Chalfen’s definition, that is, to designate moving images made in a domestic setting and for a domestic audience.<sup>1</sup> “Home movies” will refer to the home mode as shot on small-gauge film: 16mm (introduced 1923), 8mm film (1932), and Super 8mm (1965).<sup>2</sup> “Home video” will refer to the same content as shot on analog video, which encompasses many more formats and was in widespread adoption by the time of the ½-inch videotape “format war” in 1978.<sup>3</sup> Discussions of digital video will specify the digital form, consumer-grade versions of which (i.e., MiniDV) were codified in 1978.<sup>4</sup>

The formal study of the home mode in moving images began in the 1970s, when scholars began to define a specific set of aesthetic, technical, and temporal concerns for the home movie. Chalfen, one of the first academics to write extensively on home movies, defined them by their

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard Chalfen, “Cinéma Naïveté: A Study of Home Moviemaking as Visual Communication,” *Studies in Visual Communication* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1975): 87-88.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Kattelle, *Home Movies: A History of the American Industry, 1897-1979* (Transition Publishing, 2000): 333.

<sup>3</sup> Kattelle, 244.

<sup>4</sup> Library of Congress, “Digital Video Encoding (DV, DVCAM, DVCPRO),” Sustainability of Digital Formats, 21 Feb. 2017, <https://www.loc.gov/preservation/digital/formats/fdd/fdd000183.shtml>, accessed 14 Dec. 2017.

amateurism and unintentionality,<sup>5</sup> while Patricia Zimmermann's work in the 1980s recharacterized the home mode's function as an exertion of control over self-representation.<sup>6</sup> However, scholars tend to agree that domestic production methods created a distinct visual film language, defined by tropes in camera technique and human behavior such as long pans and "mugging" for the camera.<sup>7</sup> Also distinctive of the home movie paradigm is the ritual of projection, in which an intimate group, usually family and friends, screens their filmed lives in a communal setting.<sup>8</sup> Such a setting provokes reminiscences and commentary from the audience, a practice that further endows home movies with significance and specificity.<sup>9</sup> Home movies are almost always captured and projected on the same roll of reversal film—that is, the film reel that is screened is the exact same film that was in the camera—endowing the resulting filmic object with a materiality that often becomes sentimental. The combination of amateur techniques and mechanical decay create an emotional response integral to the home movie paradigm; as Stefan Szczelkun describes a home movie as having "an elegiac resonance [...] the scratched and misty surface evoked the vulnerability of memory" (97). Home movies experienced a renewed interest in the early 2000s, when Home Movie Day was founded in a bid to bring attention to amateur film,<sup>10</sup> and repositories for the collection of home movies were founded. This list includes the

---

<sup>5</sup> Richard Chalfen, "Home movies as cultural documents," in *Film/culture: Explorations of cinema in its social context* (Scarecrow, 1982): 127.

<sup>6</sup> Patricia Rodden Zimmermann, *Reel families: A social history of amateur film*. Indiana University Press, 1995.

<sup>7</sup> "The Center for Home Movies 2010 Digitization and Access Summit Final Report," *Center for Home Movies*, January 2011: 17.

<sup>8</sup> Stefan Szczelkun, "The Value of Home Movies," *Oral History* 28, no. 2 (Autumn 2000): 96.

<sup>9</sup> Patricia Erens, "The Galler Home Movies: A Case Study," *Journal of Film and Video* 38, no. 3/4 (1986): 23.

<sup>10</sup> "Home Movie Day," *Center for Home Movies*, accessed 3 December 2017, <http://www.centerforhomemovies.org/hmd/>

Texas Archive of the Moving Image (2002),<sup>11</sup> Chicago Film Archives (2003),<sup>12</sup> and the South Side Home Movie Project (2005),<sup>13</sup> among others.

Home videos are typically discussed in a less rarefied atmosphere. It is impossible to discuss home videos without discussing the changes in content generally enabled by new technologies. Orgeron and Orgeron summarized the major changes that came with analog video as “affordability, ease of use, widespread availability, and, perhaps most critically, the comparatively enormous capacity of video.”<sup>14</sup> Magnetic tape cost far less than film and could store far more content, meaning that middle- and lower-class families had far greater access to this technology and that every family could shoot video with less concern for cost. These factors naturally led to more widespread applications of video. In fact, home video often crops up as a tool in the service of other fields, rather than as a distinct archival or audiovisual concept. Home video is discussed by anthropologists as a way to disseminate news from home in upper Midwestern Hmong immigrant communities<sup>15</sup> and in medical research as a source of observable behaviors in the study of autistic children.<sup>16</sup> The sheer aggregation of home video content enables researchers to draw statistically significant conclusions from personal content, shifting the use of home video to a place beyond simple domesticity. Home videos are also discussed as disrupting the domestic context itself; video technology enables a sheer accumulation of material

---

<sup>11</sup> “About,” *Texas Archive of the Moving Image*, accessed 3 December 2017, <http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=About>

<sup>12</sup> “About CFA,” *Chicago Film Archives*, accessed 3 December 2017, <http://www.chicagofilmarchives.org/about-2>

<sup>13</sup> “About Us,” *The South Side Home Movie Project*, accessed 3 December 2017, <https://sshmp.uchicago.edu/page/about-us>

<sup>14</sup> Marsha Orgeron and Devin Orgeron, “Familial Pursuits, Editorial Acts: Documentaries after the Age of Home Video,” *Velvet Light Trap: A Critical Journal of Film and Television* 60 (Fall 2007): 49.

<sup>15</sup> Jo Ann Koltyk, “Telling Narratives Through Home Videos: Hmong Refugees and Self-Documentation of Life in the Old and New Country,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 106, no. 422 (Autumn 1993): 435-449.

<sup>16</sup> Michele Zappella, et al, “What do home videos tell us about early motor and socio-communicative behaviours in children with autistic features during the second year of life — An exploratory study,” *Early Human Development* 91 (2015): 569–575.

that extends beyond the nostalgic, nuclear-family associations of the home movie into “often unruly, invasive, and subversive...footage,”<sup>17</sup> in contrast to the “highlights reel” that home movies often comprise.

Archivists and scholars who discuss home movies tend not to extend their analysis into home video, whether by conscious or unconscious neglect. Snowden Becker began a 2001 article on home movies in museums with the caveat:

“‘Home videos’—home movie documents originally created on videotape—are not included in this discussion, as they belong to an entirely different class of technical concerns, use a substantially different visual language, and largely come from a different period in the history of amateur film, among other distinctions.”<sup>18</sup>

Even studies of home movies that explicitly include home video will treat video in the abstract rather than the specific; a 2010 summit report by the Center for Home Movies makes reference to “significantly altered practices”<sup>19</sup> and “explosion of new genres”<sup>20</sup> with video, but does not name or further discuss either. James Moran has described the reluctance to incorporate home video into moving image archival discourse in critical terms:

“...for many writers who have published widely on home movies, home video threatens the relevance, longevity, and authority of their discourse. Yet rather than modify or update their extensive research to accommodate home video, many home movie scholars may choose instead to other the new medium as essentially beyond the reach of their critical models, retreating to the polarizing either/or binaries so prevalent in specificity arguments about video.”<sup>21</sup>

Certainly the lack of scholarship on home video must be due in part to the fact that the collection and discussion of home movies has only reached critical mass in the last 15 years (with the significant exception of Northeast Historic Film, founded in 1986).<sup>22</sup> There is enough

---

<sup>17</sup> Orgeron and Orgeron, 49.

<sup>18</sup> Snowden Becker, “Family in a Can: The Presentation and Preservation of Home Movies in Museums,” *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 88.

<sup>19</sup> “The Center for Home Movies 2010 Digitization and Access Summit Final Report,” 19.

<sup>20</sup> Comment by Kate Coe in “The Center for Home Movies 2010 Digitization and Access Summit Final Report,” 23.

<sup>21</sup> James Moran, *There’s No Place Like Home Video* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002): 34.

<sup>22</sup> “About Us,” *Northeast Historic Film*, accessed 3 December 2017, <http://oldfilm.org/content/about-us>

content on home movies to feed years of format-specific study without venturing into video, especially given that analog video was still a contemporary format in the early 2000s when this wave of scholarship began. However, home videos have been making their way into archives during this time, and will continue to in greater and greater numbers as the format ages into obsolescence. Awareness of and activism for home mode content on video has been reflected in the inclusion of video formats in Home Movie Day events,<sup>23</sup> as well as a 2014 Home Video Day event to specifically champion analog and digital video.<sup>24</sup> This paper thus draws heavily on interviews with working archivists to provide more current insight into the treatment of home video in the archives.

### **Home movies and home video in the archives**

In my research for this paper, I conducted interviews (ranging widely in formality and length) with eight archivists in the fall of 2017: Ina Archer (National Museum of African-American History and Culture, or NMAAHC), Snowden Becker (a founder of Home Movie Day), Marie Lascu (a founder of Home Video Day), Candace Ming (South Side Home Movie Project, or SSHMP), Madeline Moya (Texas Archive of the Moving Image, or TAMI), Nancy Watrous (Chicago Film Archives, or CFA), David Weiss (Northeast Historic Film, or NHF), and Pam Wintle (Human Studies Film Archives, or HSFA). I also attended several events that centered on home movies and home video, including the 2017 New York City edition of Home Movie Day, Rick Prelinger's "Lost Landscapes of New York" screening and associated lectures,

---

<sup>23</sup> "2017 Home Movie Day Locations," *Center for Home Movies*, accessed 3 December 2017, <http://www.centerforhomemovies.org/2017-hmd-locations/>

<sup>24</sup> "Home Video Day," *Downtown Community Television*, accessed 3 December 2017, <http://www.dctvny.org/events/homevideoday>

and several panels at the 2017 Association of Moving Image Archivists conference in New Orleans.

The first important distinction to make is that not all institutions that collect home movies also collect home video. Of the named institutions, only NMAAHC, TAMI, and NHF actively collect home video, and the latter has not yet turned cataloging attention to its video holdings. NMAAHC and TAMI both approach home movie and video collection as digitization models; each provides free digitization of home movies and home (analog) video for members of a defined community, respectively comprising African Americans and Texans. These institutions retain only the digital file when the transfer is finished, and return the physical object to the donor.<sup>25</sup> At NMAAHC, this public digitization program is known as the “Great Migration”; the museum has also accessioned a few significant African-American home movie collections under its collecting policy, in which cases they retain the physical objects. Other film-only institutions that host physical collections may passively collect video when donated with a large film collection (CFA), or redirect video collections when offered (CFA, SSHMP).<sup>26</sup> Others simply have not been offered home video, though they collect other content on analog and digital video (HSFA).<sup>27</sup>

One reason given for why some archives did not collect video was the cost of video equipment. Candace Ming of SSHMP, a film-only repository, cited the money required to buy video playback machines as the primary reason why SSHMP did not collect video despite wanting to do so.<sup>28</sup> However, after consultation with Media Burn, a Chicago-based video

---

<sup>25</sup> Madeline Moya, interview with author, 6 December 2017; Walter Forsberg, Jasmyn Castro, Blake McDowell, Candace Ming, and Lorena Ramirez-Lopez. “The Great Migration: A Public Digitization Workflow” (panel, Association of Moving Image Archivists conference, New Orleans, LA, 2 December 2017).

<sup>26</sup> Nancy Watrous and Candace Ming, interviews with author

<sup>27</sup> Pam Wintle, interview with author, 30 November 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Candace Ming, interview with author, 16 November 2017.

archive, SSHMP now believes a basic VHS deck may be feasible in the coming year.<sup>29</sup> (Media Burn is also the institution to which CFA redirects major video donations, and CFA often receives film collections passed on from Media Burn, evidencing somewhat of a format split in Chicago.)<sup>30</sup> The perceived costs of video are partly due to the proliferation of analog video formats, as opposed to the three gauges standard to almost all amateur film since 1923. David Weiss of NHF made the point that there is far more grant money for film preservation than video, particularly on a scale appropriate to regional archives;<sup>31</sup> Marie Lascu noted specifically that there is no video equivalent of the National Film Preservation Foundation, which awards small-scale grants for basic film preservation.<sup>32</sup> Despite this lack of grant funding, Pam Wintle of the HSFA noted that she found video cheaper to digitize and store than film. Such a statement is particularly true in collections such as the HSFA, which holds large enough collections of film and analog video to maintain a subzero vault for film elements and a separate cool (around 50 degrees Fahrenheit) room for magnetic media.<sup>33</sup>

There is also a technical barrier between mechanical film and electronic video equipment. Snowden Becker noted the comparative difficulty of video exhibition at Home Movie Day events, recalling events spent switching cables and scrambling to fix the video projector while the film projector worked without a hitch.<sup>34</sup> Others perceive video equipment as a hindrance in digitization; at a talk before his exhibition of “Lost Landscapes of New York” (a compilation of amateur and orphaned film footage of New York City), Rick Prelinger said that he found video

---

<sup>29</sup> Forsberg et al, “The Great Migration” (panel).

<sup>30</sup> Nancy Watrous, interview with author, 1 December 2017.

<sup>31</sup> David Weiss, interview with author, 30 November 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Marie Lascu, interview with author, 8 December 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Wintle, interview with author.

<sup>34</sup> Snowden Becker, interview with author, 10 November 2017.



infrastructure harder to work with and preferred film because he can “scan and scan again.”<sup>35</sup>

Such a comment also touches on the notoriously fragile nature of video equipment, which is particularly prone to failure with frequent use and require either staff who can troubleshoot or a healthy budget for repair service by vendors. Particularly at archive devoted to film, video represents not just an entirely new setup, but a new technical skillset. These barriers can strain an institution already pressed for time and money to process their film collections.

While equipment requirements are the most apparent shift for institutions considering video, the changes in length between film and video also has practical consequences on staff time. Both Madeline Moya (at TAMI) and Ina Archer (at NMAAHC) noted the impact of video length on their digitization procedures, as reformatting must be done in real time. For this reason, NMAAHC imposes a daily transfer time limit on all audiovisual material. Donors must make a one-day appointment at the museum’s location in Washington, D.C., where they drop off material in the morning and leave for the 11 a.m.-4 p.m. transfer window, during which the transfer is completed by NMAAHC technicians. A five-hour window typically limits video transfers to two to four tapes per day, though donors are allowed to return for as many sessions as they wish.<sup>36</sup> TAMI travels throughout Texas soliciting film and video donations through the “Texas Round-Up” program, which limits participants to up to 50 items (no more than ten of which may be videotapes), and up to 3500 feet of film.<sup>37</sup> Despite the apparent ratio disparity of video to film, ten videotapes can easily be 20 hours long, while the maximum amount of Super 8mm film is under 4.5 hours.<sup>38</sup> Moya estimated that TAMI receives a relatively even ratio of film

---

<sup>35</sup> Rick Prelinger in conversation with Juana Suárez before presentation of “Lost Landscapes of New York,” 12 November 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Forsberg et al, “The Great Migration” (panel).

<sup>37</sup> Moya, interview with author.

<sup>38</sup> 3500 feet of Super 8mm film projected at 18 frames per second, as calculated at Scenesavers, “Film Footage Calculator,” *Scenesavers*, accessed 14 December 2017, <http://scenesavers.com/content/show/film-footage-calculator>

to video donations,<sup>39</sup> which implies that far more staff time is spent digitizing video. Moya also noted that video length impacts the work of TAMI catalogers, who review all footage in real time in order to describe and tag its contents.<sup>40</sup>

While length presents functional difficulties for archivists, it also contributes to a strong concept of video content as distinctly separate from film. The basic content of home movies and home video would seem to be the same—a domestic setting and audience, self-documentation, and highlights of family life—and some film archivists like Ming muse that her own home videos are not very different from the home movies she handles every day.<sup>41</sup> However, other archivists, like Nancy Watrous of CFA, feel that the low cost and long runtime of video meant that families approached home video far differently than film.<sup>42</sup> Most archivists immediately agreed that there was a content difference between film and video, and offered anecdotal evidence of this gap; for example, one archive received multiple tapes' worth of footage of a man's home aquarium and two hours of a gym bag in the corner, and Becker described scrubbing through hours of video content to find "the good stuff" at Home Movie Day events, while film reels were over in just a few minutes.<sup>43</sup>

Such an amount of footage is certainly unique to home videos, which were cheap, long, and rewriteable. There is a sense among archivists that amateurs were less choosy with what they shot on video, an instinct that mirrors the academic discussion of a gulf between home movie and home video content. However, the same archivists also acknowledge that the same sheer quantity of content can be invaluable. For example, Northeast Historic Film has not yet turned

---

<sup>39</sup> Moya, interview with author.

<sup>40</sup> Moya, interview with author.

<sup>41</sup> Ming, interview with author.

<sup>42</sup> Watrous, interview with author.

<sup>43</sup> Becker, interview with author.

full attention to its video holdings; the extent of video processing is capturing information written on labels, a situation that director David Weiss characterizes as “triage.” At the same time, Weiss recognizes the unique value of their video, using as examples videos of a Boston-circuit Miss America pageant and a Polish Catholic church’s polka night; both videos captured the events with a level of detail impossible in even multiple reels of film.<sup>44</sup> Pam Wintle drew a comparison between video and long-form ethnographic fieldwork, which captures complete sequences in wide shots in an attempt to reduce the bias of the filmmaker with regards to framing, editing, and choice of subject. (Indeed, a current trend in ethnographic filmmaking is to ask people in the community being studied to take footage of themselves.)<sup>45</sup>

Videotape’s low cost is another reason for its sociological and historical importance. Communities that once faced barriers to audiovisual self-documentation suddenly had far wider access to equipment and tapes. This fact plays out in many archives; for example, Moya noted that most of the content at TAMI created by Mexican-Americans is on videotape, and SSHMP’s move to obtain video equipment is partly prompted by Ming’s experience being “constantly” asked about video transfers at personal digital archiving workshops in the neighborhood.<sup>46</sup> Of course, the lowering of cost barriers is not unique to the film-to-video transition; a similar price differential played out with the introduction of 8mm film (as opposed to 16mm), which Prelinger called a “real watershed” in representation of poorer communities.<sup>47</sup> But the simplicity of videocassettes, which are ready to go “out of the box” (as Becker put it),<sup>48</sup> also reduced the

---

<sup>44</sup> Weiss, interview with author.

<sup>45</sup> Wintle, interview with author.

<sup>46</sup> Ming, in Forsberg et al, “The Great Migration” (panel).

<sup>47</sup> Prelinger, conversation with Juana Suárez.

<sup>48</sup> Becker, interview with author.

technical knowledge necessary to get a decent image, which served as well to drive down barriers to audiovisual self-representation.

There is another highly pressing reason for moving image archivists to embrace and solicit videotape: the simple fact that it is the only audiovisual carrier with records of American family life in the 1980s through early 2000s. As Marie Lascu puts it, “It’s not a discussion, it’s just happening”—video is entering archives in personal papers and institutional records whether or not home movie archives collect it.<sup>49</sup> Without attention paid to video, footage of middle-class America in the 1980s and 1990s will not survive. For those archives who collect home movies for historical purposes, a concept of the 1980s-2000s as worthy of historical documentation should necessarily motivate adoption of video collection. But if a sense of historical urgency does not prove adequate at the present moment, the simple passage of time likely will. Those archives whose model is to transfer home movies and video on demand find that the public often wants their audiovisual content transferred to digital because they can no longer access their own histories in either format. In regional institutions, home movies serve as community memory and historical evidence; the progression of time and obsolescence of analog video will inevitably heighten the sense of urgency. Snowden Becker noted that video has gained significance proportional to its age, entering more and more film-only spaces as distance grows between its heyday and today.<sup>50</sup> There is still little enough conception of home video as worthy of archiving that some archives are not approached with video, but it may be argued that archivists have a responsibility to be more forward-thinking on this front than the public at large.

There are many other, perhaps unexpected, rewards to be found in collecting video. For example, the extra time required to digitize video may provide extended chances to gather

---

<sup>49</sup> Lascu, interview with author.

<sup>50</sup> Becker, interview with author.

context and metadata. At a Community Curation Program in Baltimore hosted by NMAAHC, donors sat next to staff as they digitized materials in a departure from NMAAHC's usual policy. As Archer transferred videos with the donors looking on, she found that they began to fill up "dead time" in the content with talking and reminiscing about the videos and their lives.<sup>51</sup> Such a response mimics the act of projecting home movies; while the audience is an archivist rather than family and friends, viewing the video in a semi-communal setting elicits similar interaction and acts as a springboard for anecdotes and contextual information. And while the process of screening home movies with archivist and donor present has been suggested as an accessioning procedure for home movies,<sup>52</sup> home videos, by dint of their length, present far more prolonged opportunities for contextual information (while, of course, demanding extended staff time). Home videos have also yielded examples of era-specific videographer compilations and prosumer effects<sup>53</sup> or captured content on television, perhaps taped over the family footage. Some home movies only survive as videos after having been transferred.<sup>54</sup>

Archivists who collect home movies are not unfamiliar with difficulty in advocating for neglected formats, as a similar struggle frames the emergence of home movies as a recognized genre in the early 2000s. In the early years of the Human Studies Film Archives (when it was known as the National Anthropological Film Center in the 1970s), Pam Wintle was told to separate and deaccession anthropologists' home movies from their ethnographic work; Wintle says she would fight to keep the home movies today, and indeed the HSFA holds several home movie collections as anthropological evidence in their own right.<sup>55</sup> For Snowden Becker, the

---

<sup>51</sup> Ina Archer, interview with author, 2 December 2017.

<sup>52</sup> Becker, "Family in a Can," 97-98.

<sup>53</sup> Archer, interview with author.

<sup>54</sup> Becker, interview with author.

<sup>55</sup> Wintle, interview with author.

catalyst for Home Movie Day was seeing people throw away reels of film as soon as they were transferred to VHS. At that moment, the point was not to villainize VHS, as the format is certainly good enough for access, but to remind people of the importance of film. At one Home Movie Day screening, Becker demonstrated the quality of film by projecting a participant's original reel of film next to the VHS transfer of the same reel.<sup>56</sup> And yet many archivists do not make the same leap to video; Nancy Watrous and David Weiss both cite the lack of materiality of video, with Weiss describing videotape as having a certain "quality," but not "experience."<sup>57</sup> Prelinger said outright in a discussion of his (film-only) *Lost Landscapes* series that he does not think he "can make an interesting movie about people from the '80s," though he hopes other people will take up the mantle with video.<sup>58</sup> These archivists are hardly slouches—rather, they have spent enormous energy advocating for small-gauge amateur film in eras when video was contemporary rather than on a steep decline. But the next generation to carry on their work must extend their attention to this next problem of obsolescence and inattention.

However deep the perceived differences of home movies and home videos, contemporary audiovisual recording takes yet another giant leap of theory and practice. Into the film-video continuum, we must eventually insert digital home videos, by far the dominant form of personal audiovisual recording today. Typically filmed with and stored on a phone, rather than a dedicated audiovisual recorder, these digital files are easy to record, cheap enough to store, and incredibly volatile. They present a staggering leap in content volume, akin to the transition between film and analog video. Digital video recorders are also omnipresent in a way that analog video never quite became. Phones capable of recording video are constantly in people's pockets, which

---

<sup>56</sup> Becker, interview with author.

<sup>57</sup> Watrous and Weiss, interviews with author.

<sup>58</sup> Prelinger, conversation with Juana Suárez.

means that they are far more likely to be used on a moment's notice. However, since phones are used for many other purposes, the video they produce is likely far more disjointed and more like clips than analog video was—perhaps even closer to a film reel's montage of highlights than the long analog video shots that preceded digital video.<sup>59</sup> Another quirk of the purely digital form, whether born-digital or analog, physical concerns of the formats are somewhat elided.

Sometimes even the fact of the format itself is omitted; in its online catalog, TAMI does not specify the original format of its digital files, and refers to content originally on both film and video as “home movies.”<sup>60</sup> (NMAAHC does not yet have content from its Great Migration project online.) CFA, HSFA, NHF, and SSHMP (in the beta version of its public catalog) each specify original format, and often total footage length as well. In all cases, the original formats are evident from the quality and artifacts of the digital video; however, it is not yet totally clear what that means for an aesthetic experience filtered through digital perception.

It seems apparent that the perceptual differences between home movies and home video are small compared to the larger concerns shared between both formats and with amateur, non-narrative, and sometimes orphan films at large—and all genres together form an under-studied corner of cinema studies and archives at large. The passage of time will likely help underscore the similarities, rather than the differences, of film and video, and the introduction of born-digital video into the archival mix cannot help but make analog video look terribly manageable in comparison. Whether home movies or home video, the important part is to save the material.

Pam Wintle noted that much of the value of home movies and video is not simply in the

---

<sup>59</sup> Ari Greenberg, comment to author after presentation of this paper, New York University, 13 December 2017.

<sup>60</sup> For examples, see: (film) “The Cristela Gonzalez Bond Collection, no. 8 - The Quinceañera (1965),” accessed 12 December, 2017, [http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=2013\\_04578](http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=2013_04578), and (video) “The Garcia Collection, no. 2 - Quinceañera Celebration (1989),” accessed 12 December, 2017, [http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=The\\_Garcia\\_Collection,\\_no.\\_2\\_-\\_Quincea%C3%B1era\\_Celebration\\_\(1989\)](http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=The_Garcia_Collection,_no._2_-_Quincea%C3%B1era_Celebration_(1989))

documentation of birthday parties, but in the comparison of birthday parties across cities, classes, and decades.<sup>61</sup> We cannot know what tomorrow's scholars will use home movies, home video, or digital home video for, but that fact makes our jobs as archivists easier: we should save them, wait, and see.

---

<sup>61</sup> Wintle, interview with the author.



## Bibliography

- “2017 Home Movie Day Locations.” *Center for Home Movies*. Accessed 3 December 2017.  
<http://www.centerforhomemovies.org/2017-hmd-locations/>
- “About.” *Texas Archive of the Moving Image*. Accessed 3 December 2017.  
<http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=About>
- “About CFA.” *Chicago Film Archives*. Accessed 3 December 2017.  
<http://www.chicagofilmarchives.org/about-2>
- “About Us.” *Northeast Historic Film*. Accessed 14 December 2017.  
<http://oldfilm.org/content/about-us>
- “About Us.” *The South Side Home Movie Project*. Accessed 3 December 2017.  
<https://sshmp.uchicago.edu/page/about-us>
- Archer, Ina. Interview by Annie Schweikert. 2 December 2017.
- Becker, Snowden. “Family in a Can: The Presentation and Preservation of Home Movies in Museums.” *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 88-106.
- Becker, Snowden. Interview by Annie Schweikert. 10 November 2017.
- “The Center for Home Movies 2010 Digitization and Access Summit Final Report,” *Center for Home Movies*, January 2011.
- Chalfen, Richard. “Cinéma Naïveté: A Study of Home Moviemaking as Visual Communication.” *Studies in Visual Communication* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1975): 87-103.
- Chalfen, Richard. “Home movies as cultural documents.” In *Film/culture: Explorations of cinema in its social context*. Scarecrow, 1982: 126-37.
- Erens, Patricia. “The Galler Home Movies: A Case Study.” *Journal of Film and Video* 38, no. 3/4 (1986): 15-24.
- Forsberg, Walter, Jasmyn Castro, Blake McDowell, Candace Ming, and Lorena Ramirez-Lopez. “The Great Migration: A Public Digitization Workflow.” Presentation at the Association of Moving Image Archivists conference, New Orleans, LA. December 2, 2017.
- Greenberg, Ari. Comment to author after presentation of this paper. New York University, New York, NY. 13 December 2017.
- “Home Movie Day.” *Center for Home Movies*. Accessed 3 December 2017.  
<http://www.centerforhomemovies.org/hmd/>

“Home Video Day.” *Downtown Community Television*. Accessed 3 December 2017.  
<http://www.dctvny.org/events/homevideoday>

Kattelle, Alan. *Home Movies: A History of the American Industry, 1897-1979*. Transition Publishing, 2000.

Koltyk, Jo Ann. “Telling Narratives Through Home Videos: Hmong Refugees and Self-Documentation of Life in the Old and New Country.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 106, no. 422 (Autumn 1993): 435-449.

Lascu, Marie. Interview by Annie Schweikert. 8 December 2017.

Library of Congress. “Digital Video Encoding (DV, DVCAM, DVCPR0).” *Sustainability of Digital Formats*. 21 Feb. 2017. Accessed 14 Dec. 2017.  
<https://www.loc.gov/preservation/digital/formats/fdd/fdd000183.shtml>

Ming, Candace. Interview by Annie Schweikert. 16 November 2017.

Moran, James. M. *There’s No Place Like Home Video*. University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Moya, Madeline. Interview by Annie Schweikert. 6 December 2017.

Orgeron, Marsha, and Devin Orgeron. “Familial Pursuits, Editorial Acts: Documentaries after the Age of Home Video.” *Velvet Light Trap: A Critical Journal of Film and Television* 60 (Fall 2007): 47-62.

Prelinger, Rick. Conversation with Juana Suárez before presentation of “Lost Landscapes of New York.” 12 November 2017.

Scenesavers. “Film Footage Calculator.” *Scenesavers*. Accessed 14 December 2017.  
<http://scenesavers.com/content/show/film-footage-calculator>

Sherman, Sharon R. *Documenting Ourselves: Film, Video, and Culture*. University Press of Kentucky, 1998.

Szczelkun, Stefan. “The Value of Home Movies.” *Oral History* 28, no. 2 (Autumn 2000): 94-98.

Texas Archive of the Moving Image. “The Cristela Gonzalez Bond Collection, no. 8 - The Quinceañera (1965).” *Texas Archive of the Moving Image*. Accessed 12 December 2017.  
[http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=2013\\_04578](http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=2013_04578)

Texas Archive of the Moving Image. “The Garcia Collection, no. 2 - Quinceañera Celebration (1989).” *Texas Archive of the Moving Image*. Accessed 12 December 2017.

[http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=The Garcia Collection, no. 2 - Quincea%C3%B1era Celebration \(1989\)](http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=The_Garcia_Collection,_no._2_-_Quincea%C3%B1era_Celebration_(1989))

Watrous, Nancy. Interview by Annie Schweikert. 1 December 2017.

Weiss, David. Interview by Annie Schweikert. 30 November 2017.

Wintle, Pam. Interview by Annie Schweikert. 30 November 2017.

Zappella, Michele, et al. "What do home videos tell us about early motor and socio-communicative behaviours in children with autistic features during the second year of life — An exploratory study." *Early Human Development* 91 (2015): 569–575.

Zimmermann, Patricia Rodden. *Reel families: A social history of amateur film*. Indiana University Press, 1995.