



# MINING THE

EXCAVATIONS IN HISTORIES AND MEMORIES

# HOME MOVIE

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recycling, repackaging, and reformatting of work without the risky outlay of production costs.<sup>15</sup> Works now live in multiple formats, traveling from film to video to cable to DVD, and they are also reedited and repackaged for different target markets in endless iterations. The transnational media industries' economic incentive to capitalize on their archives as a way to generate a higher return on investment, combined with their transformation from production to protection of intellectual property, creates the larger economic context for the expansion of the film archive.

Scholarly and archival interest in both the United States and Europe has signaled a move to consider visual historical evidence from sources other than commercial production houses as a way to expand visual representation and to represent a wider and more diverse range of historical experience. Since the early 1980s, spurred by "the new history," many disciplines, including sociology, communications, history, politics, and cultural studies, have moved toward analyzing everyday life.<sup>16</sup> The scholarly, archival, and artistic interest in home movies as an important body of repressed knowledge to be reactivated and reworked within new historiographic and artistic paradigms emerged within this larger scholarly context of searching for a form of history that was diverse, multicultural, racialized, feminist, and regional.

A large body of independently produced experimental and documentary work emerged in the 1980s, often intermingling genres and source material like home movies and influenced by the feminist, civil rights, and antiwar movements of the 1960s and 1970s. These works moved beyond the compilation-focused, evidentiary-driven histories that so identified independent documentary in the 1970s, exemplified by such diverse works as *Amerika*, *The War at Home*, *The Good Fight*, and *Rosie the Riveter*, with their epic quality of giving voice to unknown everyday figures of political history. These newer works combined historical exhumation of lost voices with artistic manipulation of lost images, interrogating the fracture between archival history and personal memory. The work of artists like Richard Fung, Daniel Reeves, Lise Yasui, and others conceptualized history beyond great events, moving it toward a tactic of psychic tracings. These artists positioned the family and identity formation as sites for politics, history, and resistance to larger events and structures by hybridizing diverse source material such as newsreels, interviews, experimental forms, testimony, and home movies.<sup>17</sup>

By 1988 in the United States, there was an escalation in the conflict between public archives, interested in the preservation of historically significant materials, and the Hollywood film industry, which was intent on capitalizing on and creating new markets for archival films through new technologies.<sup>18</sup>

1999. Orphan Film Symposium II, "Documenting the 20th Century," was held in March 2001; Orphan Film Symposium III, "Sound/Music/Voice: Listening to Orphan Films," in September 2002; and Orphan Film Symposium IV, "On Location: Place and Region in Forgotten Films," in March 2004. These four symposia have functioned to generate new research and curatorial activities and have lent increased visibility to the orphan film cause. They have also provided a significant academic and curatorial context for amateur film research.

The Orphan Film symposia, together with an important presence for orphan, amateur, and small-gauge films within the Association of Moving Image Archivists throughout the 1990s and afterward, suggest the coalescing of various international and regional movements to look more closely at these subaltern cinemas. Until the 1990s, home movies and amateur film were typically not archived; instead archives around the world focused primarily on the preservation and restoration of feature films representing the various expressions of national cinemas, with secondary attention to documentary. A few public archives—most notably the Japanese American National Museum, Northeast Historic Film, the Human Studies Film Archives, and the Netherlands Archive/Museum Institute—and a few private collectors who were mostly experimental documentary filmmakers—such as Alan Berliner (United States), Péter Forgács (Hungary), Daniel Reeves (Scotland), and the organization Reel Folks (Canada)—have created an international movement to redirect film history and film archives away from an exclusive emphasis on commercial features and national art cinemas toward noncommercial works produced by everyday people. Significant archival reclamation of amateur films has also been undertaken by regional film archives across the world, in part as a response to limited development of national feature film industries in certain countries. Archives in Wales, Scotland, Singapore, Mexico, and Colombia exemplify this strategy of using amateur film to redefine national identity in the absence of a significant indigenous film industry.

Various academic and journalistic sectors of the international amateur film reclamation movement have also published books, monographs, and special edited volumes dedicated to analyzing and understanding home movies and amateur film as an untapped area of film history requiring further exploration and theorization. In 1986, the *Journal of Film and Video* was one of the first scholarly journals to dedicate an entire issue to the question of amateur film and home movies, with articles spanning technological history, the use of home movies in the avant-garde, and the deployment of amateur film in documentary and narrative film. In France in 1995, the Centre Georges Pompidou published *Le je filmé*, a collection of essays that

The first international anthology to explore the historical significance of amateur film, *Mining the Home Movie* makes visible, through image and analysis, the hidden yet ubiquitous world of home moviemaking. These essays boldly combine primary research, archival collections, critical analyses, filmmakers' own stories, and new theoretical approaches regarding the meaning and value of amateur and archival films. Volume editors Karen L. Ishizuka and Patricia R. Zimmermann have fashioned a groundbreaking volume that identifies home movies as vital—and underestimated—methods of visually preserving history.

“By claiming home movies as essential tools of historiography, Ishizuka and Zimmermann manage to break down artificial barriers between public histories and private records. In this groundbreaking volume, their selection of visionary essays offers a way to reclaim devalued work and turn the tables on the cataloguers. Absolutely required reading for historians, curators, and media analysts.”

—**B. Ruby Rich**, author of *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement*

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Cover design: Sandy Drooker

Cover illustration: *Top*: Frame from Wittgenstein *Tractatus*, by Péter Forgács, 1992; courtesy of Péter Forgács. *Bottom*: Frame from *Something Strong Within*, by Robert A. Nakamura and Karen L. Ishizuka, 1994; courtesy of the Japanese American National Museum.

