Alessandra Gribaldo
University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy

The advent of ourselves as others. Family films and anthropology

Abstract:
The aim of this article is to propose an anthropology of a peculiar document that is the amateur family film. These intimate visual documents represent a privileged space for an anthropological approach, which has developed its discourse on the construction and projection of differences, similarities, and otherness. Starting from the definition of what "familiar" means in the family film, I will articulate anthropological thinking on footage with ethnographic practices, in search for convergences and distances, through the analysis of a family archive filmed by a woman of peasant origin, from the early 1960s to the 1980s, between Emilia Romagna, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia. I suggest that these visual fragments, only partially filled with meaning by the words of those who made them, are spaces with the capacity to show -also through an undisciplined aesthetic- a different "us", an invisible relatedness. It is a suspended projection, neither celebratory or predatory, of the places, objects and subjects encountered.

The author:
Alessandra Gribaldo is Associate Professor at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia. Her main research interest are kinship, body and gender in the context of reproductive technologies (*La Natura Scomposta*, 2005); gender and ethnography (ed. with V. Ribeiro Corossacz, *La produzione del genere*, 2010); the relationship between visuality and gender (*Lo schermo del potere. Femminismo e regime della visibilità,* 2012, with art historian Giovanna Zapperi); kinship and migration, (*Boundaries within* 2017, ed. with sociologist Francesca Decimo); intimate partner violence (*Unexpected Subjects*, Hau Books, 2021). Her latest research project focuses on an anthropology of home movies.

e-mail:
alessandra.gribaldo@unimore.it

2 There are already elements that can be found in the family films and that will become common codes in later decades: the close-up, on faces and gestures (different from the full-figure shots favoured in the series of other short Lumière films); the intimate and familiar dimension; the "partial" mise-en-scène (the child is in fact fed, but the mother evidently pretends to drink from her cup); the person filming is an intimate and familiar figure, namely uncle Louis Lumière.

3 See Brodesco and Cau 2023 for an overview.

Une chose est certaine: si l'on ne s'intéresse pas à ces films,
eux, s'intéressent à nous
(Roger Odin)

People are bad, cinema is innocent
(Jonas Mekas)

What is familiar in family films

In this article[1] I propose a reflection on the pertinence and opportunities of an anthropological approach to family films. The object of study are the family film archives deposited in the national archive of family films "Home Movies" in Bologna, Italy, and which concern the sphere of intimacy relationships filmed in a precise historical moment -between the first decades of the 20th century and the 1980s. This necessarily entails confronting certain thematic nodes that run through the discipline of anthropology. First, whereas anthropology works on difference, home movies question the discipline as they communicate an "us" that is easily understood and rooted in a visual and intimate experience. Because they are codified within a genre, home movies are easily recognizable. Despite the substantial saturation of the visual in which we currently live, the effect that the viewing of a family film produces in an audience is very similar to that exerted in the early days of cinema. It is no coincidence that among the very first film documents there is the famous "Repas de bébé", shot in 1895 in the garden of the Lumière house at Monplaisir in Lyon, where the father Auguste and mother Marguerite feed little Andrée[2]. The enchantment and "rediscovery" of the small gauge concerns, among other things, a substantial recognition of the authenticity of a shared memory. It is precisely this peculiarity, the "recognizability" of these documents, that I would like to focus on.

The history of home movies is significant in itself: often abandoned, without an acknowledged author, for long represented by a mass of potentially endless and constitutively fragmentary footage at risk of deterioration, these documents have become the object of an important recent recovery and rehabilitation, not only in the artistic sphere (as demonstrated by an exhibition at MoMA, New York, in 2019 and the now widespread use of artistic and cinematographic montages from found footage[3]), but also, since the 1990s, from the perspective of socio-historical sciences (Zimmerman 1995; Odin 1995; Moran 2002; Ishizuka and Zimmerman 2007; Cati 2009; Rascaroli et. al. 2014; Simoni 2018).

Historians and semioticians have discussed at length the defining characteristics of a family film. A first definition concerns the space of intimacy: the family film is, in many ways, comparable to a moving family album (Odin 2014). Frames taken from family films have been used, in some cases, as pictures in an enlarged format by wealthy families in the first decades of the 20th century (Cati 2009: 40), and we may say that family films are themselves films "taken" from photographs.

The family film involves, similarly to family photographs, an overlap between the filmmaker, the subject being filmed, and the viewer. For the amateur -the person who is filming- and the viewer, the family film is indeed a moving picture. The assertion of unity between those who film and those who are filmed in home movies lies in the greetings, kisses, smiles, indulgences, poses, and references to the presence of the camera. The cinematic rule that forbids looking into the camera is constantly violated here; actually, the overt presence of the camera coincides with the dominant code of representation. The profilmic effects that are almost systematically encountered in home movies relate to intimacy and closeness with family photos: filmed subjects are asked to respond to the request of the filmmaker and to the presence of the camera itself, in order to perform, produce the spectacle of movement, show and make themselves interesting. Faced with the request to move (to "do something"),

the filmed subjects often express stiff poses or embarrassment; there is no lack of grimaces, agitated gestures, escapes, or ironic theatrics (De Kuyper 1995: 14). After all, the camera does something very unseemly: it looks insistently, "staring" at people. The breaking of a cinematic code -the prohibition of looking into the camera- becomes the norm as the eye of the film maker is what gives meaning to the footage, reaffirming the shared intimacy between the one who shoots and the one being filmed. It is the amateur who decides, in the instant, what is worth being part of the moving album, and the fact of owing the camera sanctions this defining power.

As illustrated by Odin, a further series of characters make family films a systematic negation of the defining characteristics of cinema: the absence of closure, the narrative splitting, the indetermination of time and space, the frequent jumps, the violation of the 180-degree rule, or the shot-reverse shot. In the peculiar codes of the family film, what would simply be "bad cinema", or badly-directed cinema, becomes the mark of a genre in a dreamlike logic that works by additions and that "sets our inner cinema in motion" (Odin 1995: 33). Authenticity plays an important role: thanks to these devices that make viewing non-linear, the family film, regardless of the patina of time added by the grain of the format, already presents itself in the form of a memory. Just as an overly well-made documentary ends up raising questions about its authenticity, the family film ratifies its verisimilitude to the extreme as being immediate, spontaneous, unconstructed, undirected, natural -in a word- authentic and recognizable. Paradoxically, however, a further dimension connotes the family film and, at the same time, distances it from what should appear as true and authentic, the testimony of a lived moment. In fact, family films systematically exclude what is truly intimate -conflict, pain, sex, mourning- and make happiness the ultimate meaning of family representation. While this brings home movies back to the logic of the family album, moving images accentuate this disposition as the authenticity provided by the often frenetic restlessness of the camera literally feeds on good humor.

Home movies are well-known portraits of well-being. It is the upper classes from the 1920s onwards, and then in the 1960s, those who participate in the economic boom, who own a camera. The moving images of the everyday life of working classes or of those who do not belong to a white, western, middle class, will be primarily shot because of someone else's interest and notably as an ethnological subject, ultimately being produced by the gaze of the other. Thus, the home movie embodies a paradox: what is most true (fragments of immediate life, filmed without a precise plan and regarding the family in its spontaneity and recognizable order) is connoted by an evident censorship. The smiles narrate what is left out, which is revealed only by a montage and an off-screen voice, as can be appreciated in intimate movies based on family footage, such as that by recent Nobel Prize winner Anne Ernoux (*The Super8 Years*, 2022). The imagery of family films draws on the codes of advertising (Journot and Duchet 1995), particularly those of the 1960s, in that it refers to intimacy, identification, the stereotyped aesthetics of the postcard, the centrality of satisfaction and enjoyment, the invention of the everyday and the erasure of the negative, the memory of a desirable future. It is no coincidence that the super8 "effect" has become a code, now reproducible with a simple "filter" in current digital filming devices.

The specific kinship dimension of this production deserves to be emphasized. It is the family that narrates its own happiness, producing a document from itself, about itself and for itself. The family film, by combining intimacy and relationality, communicates the memory of kinship as a safe, protected, inviolable space: the "we were happy" (De Kuyper 1995: 15), exactly there, at that moment. The onlooker is not a spectator, but a witness, as good humor is not easily told and not simply shown, rather it is shared (idem). The viewing of family films for a non-intimate audience has been largely neglected, as these visual documents have been deemed totally self-referential and incomprehen-

4 Allard reports the position of director Bertrand Tavernier for whom the experience of public viewing of family films is 'troglodytic' (1995, 120).

5 See Gribaldo 2016 for a commentary.

6 The image that is dearest to the author in Barthes' analysis is that of his mother as a child, which, however, is not shown in the text: it cannot appear because it is significant only to the author. It is the intimate image par excellence, the one that cannot be shown, an image with a single viewer.

7 Here the reference is undoubtedly Bourdieu's work *Un art moyen: Essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie,* published in 1965.

sible to those outside the intimate circuit around which they were produced[4]. In this respect, home movies reveal a distinctly connoted dimension of kinship and relationality (Carsten 2000; Grilli 2019). Although kinship has been a central theme in anthropology since its inception, its ambiguity has struggled to emerge. Relatively few scholars have noted the insistence on the positive connotation of kinship and relationality in anthropology (Peletz 2001; Edwards and Strathern 2000). Recently, the complexity and ambivalence regarding the type of relationship that kinship creates has been highlighted (Strathern 2020), yet the idea of kinship, parental relations, and relatedness as a positive space insofar as it is relational and, therefore, exquisitely human, persists (Sahlins 2014)[5].

With regard to the time and space of the photographic representation of family intimacy, one cannot but return to some of Barthes' reflections. In his famous essay on photography, he dwells precisely on family photographs[6], dealing with certain questions that resonate on the meaning of family films in anthropological terms: "the Photograph is never anything but an antiphon of 'Look', 'See', 'Here it is'; it points a finger at certain *vis-a-vis,* and cannot escape this pure deictic language" (Barthes 1981: 5). These lines refer to those moments when we show our photos to someone else: "he will immediately show you his: 'Look, this is my brother; this is me as a child', etc" (ibid). Photos alone cannot say much without commentary: relatives are relationship, they only exist as they are to ourselves. We could actually read into this compulsive communication the mutual recognition, which has no content other than the intimate and parental relationship, where kinship is something deeply shared. It is precisely following the Barthesian sensibility, dissatisfied with a sociological interpretation that reads amateur photography as "the trace of a social protocol of integration, intended to reassert the Family"[7] (ivi: 7), that we can follow the desire to look at these visual objects as "primitive, without culture" (ibid). The least anthropological of approaches, one might say, yet here emerges a sensibility that takes seriously the shared dimension, aesthetic and intimate, that family photographs and - we might add to an even greater extent, films - communicate. A little further on, Barthes argues that photography can be defined "the advent of myself as other" (ivi: 12). Precisely, family films, amateur moving images filmed within intimate contexts - and their popularization in the season of the super8 format from its inception in 1965 to the 1970s - recount *the advent of ourselves as others.* They represent a privileged space for an anthropological approach, which has built its discourse on the dimension of gaze and the construction and projection of differences, similarities and otherness. Here, I wish to dwell further into a possible articulation of anthropological reflections on cinema with ethnographic practices, highlighting possible convergences and divarications.

An ethnography of home movies; home movies as ethnography

The analysis of the relationship between ethnography and film has historically identified a specific spectatorial dynamic of a white, western gaze towards the Other, the "ethnos" of ethnography (cf. among others, Tobing Rony 1996). This is a literature that confronts anthropological theory on the construction of otherness (Fabian 1983), where temporality and visuality underpin devices that create an observable, given, historically racialized difference. Recent studies further articulate the visual and filmed dimension by opening the construction of the gaze to broader readings, moving on to analyze marginal, found films that break into the historiography of the gaze on otherness as "strange objects". Particularly on the relationship between ethnography and cinema, Katherine Groo considers early footage from the 1920s, found by chance, concerning distant places, landscapes, people and animals (Groo 2019): these unnamed and unclassified documents "uncanny or spectral remainder", (ibid.: 2); "visual fragments lacking good sense" (ibid.: 6), allow for productive

reflections on the intertwine of ethnography and visuality. The author proposes to consider these very early forms of filming -documents that have been ignored or considered out of place in an official film historiography - as "ethnographic". These "bad films" can be analyzed in their suspension between personal archive and natural history or colonial museum archive as expressing "a distinct lack of epistemological certainty rather than a clear expression of ideological force or a stable difference between spectators and subjects-on-screen" (ibid.: 4).

Similarly, we can approach family films, with their seriality and their systematic corruption of the cinematic code, as a kind of self-produced visual archive. It is a representation that, although recognizable, remains undisciplined and constitutively out of place as it is somehow "useless" in the terms proper to a documentary testimony, an artistic work, a truthful memory. Based on Groo's reflections on found footage and early ethnographic films, one can think of family films as "metahistorical documents, that is, ones that make the structures of film historical imagination and practice available for thought, critique, and, potentially, revision" (Groo 2019: 2-3). In particular, the dimension of the unedited, amateurish quality of the footage and the improvisation that adapts to the event, as well as the following of the detail in everyday events, brings family films closer to fieldwork. The ethnographic methodology of the anthropological tradition envisages long and apparently unproductive times, waits, returns, hesitations, "perduction" (Piasere 2002: 55). One of the aspects that is usually addressed as characteristic of family film viewing is the passage from an initial reaction of enchantment to boredom: it is the same amateurs who, when they attempt to chase a wider audience, regret not having cut and edited more rigorously, criticizing their own lingering or the excessive length of the footage (Gribaldo 2022).

This reference to banality, to boredom, to a vision where nothing that happens catches the eye and requires adequate knowledge, an adherence, even affective, of what is happening to be able to appreciate the details, occupies an important place in ethnographic practice. Boredom has an ambiguous character; it is a perception of something that is too much, or, on the contrary, too little: either an abundance or an absence of stimuli. The very dimension of perception, moreover, is historically linked to the visual: the nature of attention, the relationship to the stimulus, the focalization and distraction, are closely related to vision (Petro 1995).

These reflections lead us back to Benjamin's theorization of the optical unconscious, access to which is provided by photography and cinema. The optical unconscious emerges through attention to details and the imperceptible, what the senses do not register, and normally it is not necessary to register. It is worth quoting Benjamin's famous passage:

> With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. And just as enlargement not merely clarifies what we see indistinctly "in any case," but brings to light entirely new structures of matter, slow motion not only reveals familiar aspects of movements, but discloses quite unknown aspects within them-aspects "which do not appear as the retarding of natural movements but have a curious gliding, floating character of their own." Clearly, it is another nature which speaks to the camera as compared to the eye. "Other" above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious. Whereas it is a commonplace that, for example, we have some idea what is involved in the act of walking (if only in general terms), we have no idea at all what happens during the split second when a person actually takes a step. We are familiar with the movement of picking up a cigarette lighter or a spoon, but know almost nothing of what really goes on between hand and metal, and still less how this varies with different moods. This is where the camera comes into play,

with all its resources for swooping and rising, disrupting and isolating, stretching or compressing a sequence, enlarging or reducing an object. It is through the camera that we first discover the optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis (Benjamin 2008: 37).

Benjamin's words have been commented above all regarding the comparison with the Freudian unconscious as a key to understanding family photography, as the latter is the space par excellence where the structures of repression operate (Hirsch 2002, 119). We can, for the sake of our argument, further note that what emerges at the level of perception through sight, and which corresponds to the optical unconscious, refers to a decisive element for anthropological research, the very element on which ethnographic methodology and participant observation is based, namely the everyday.

In this regard, recent ethnographic work on the construction and constant effort to "make" the everyday, i.e. common, normal, and expected, underlines a change that the notion has undergone over time in anthropology (Heywood 2022). This is a shift between the historical ways in which anthropology has referred to the everyday and the ordinary from adjective to noun: in Geertz, "the everyday" becomes, in contrast to the classical tradition (starting with Malinowski's "imponderabilia of everyday life"), an object in itself of ethnography in a process of substantivation: the context in which a methodology of knowledge is exercised. What is ordinary, automatically becomes noteworthy in itself.

The attention to the everyday, in the tradition of "observational cinema", which exceeds and surpasses theory conveyed exclusively by writing, has to do with the possibility of looking at something that is detail: through the elimination of cumbersome cinematic devices, focusing on the experience of the life-form of the filming operator, this approach suggests a possibility of corporeal and essentially transcultural understanding. However, it is worth remembering, following Heywood, that the ordinary, like culture, is a historical and situated concept that can be deployed in different ways. In the possible declinations of everyday life, the visibility/invisibility pair is decisive. As Groo argues, we can think of the ethnographic document "not defined by what representation includes or contains (i.e., discourses or images of culture) but by what it fails to contain, what it lacks, and by the processes of supplementarity and excursion that endeavour to conceal these absences" (Groo 2019: 33).

If, in visual ethnography, montage undoubtedly makes visible what is not normally visible, one can ask whether invisibility can be rendered without replacing it or translating it into new forms of visibility (Suhr and Villerslev, 2013). In family films, this element of invisibility is always present. These films are made not only for remembrance, but to evoke something else, something that is not exactly visible and that has to do with kinship and relationality. With the constant and at times obsessive unfolding of a genealogy, of identifiable relationships, of effective and shared rites of passage, of the representation of the relationship between individuals that seems almost physical given the proximity, the touching, the kissing, the moving in delimited spaces, the home movies render what is suggested by the two authors: "But what if vision is not subjective, but rather an effect of our relations with one another [...]-that is, what if vision exists, so to speak, 'between us' rather than 'within us'"? (ibid.: 286).

Rather than the expression of an ideological force that stages the family with its norms and idiosyncrasies, a certain lack and hesitation seem to emerge from the family background. This lack stems from the confusion between those who film and those who are filmed and the consequent absence of a consequential narrative, as the potential audience is not a spectator, but a witness and participant. Thus, similarly to the unclassified and unclassifiable early ethnographic films of the 20th century analyzed by Groo, family films

defy definitions, forcing a rethinking of gaze as an instrument of recognition, self-representation and testimony, and somehow demanding a different status. As metacommunicative documents, home movies question the discipline of anthropology regarding the notions of difference and identity, self-representation, collective memory, kinship, everyday life and visual relevance.

Self-representation, experimentation and intimacy in amateur films

Analyses that position film experimentation within the framework of ethnographic theory can represent an interesting spin-off for an analysis of family films. Catherine Russell, in her comparison of experimental cinema to ethnography, argues that "autobiography becomes ethnographic at the point where the film- or videomaker understands his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes" (Russell 1999: 276). In experimental cinema -which apparently has no relation with the ethnographic dimension- the role of identity "demands an expanded notion of 'ethnicity' as a cultural formation of the subject" (ibid.: 279). Approaching experimentalists such as Jonas Mekas, Russell makes arguments that suggest an affinity between family film and the avant-garde.

Mekas, a naturalized Lithuanian-American film maker, is author and subject of his films and his poetics refer to a kind of salvage filming. The time gap between filming and editing in *Reminescences of a Journey in Lithuania* (1972), makes it resemble to a found footage film (ibid.: 282). His imagery is generally reminiscent of family films as he shoots his own circle of friends, the intimacy of which he wishes to crystallize as memory. For Mekas it is a matter of recording the world of the New York film avant-garde of those years, therefore potential audiences and at the same time potential authors of whose work Mekas is a spectator, in a form of filmed autobiography. It is no coincidence that Mekas' films have been called the "home movies of the avant-garde" (Ruoff 1992 in Russell 1999: 285; see also Simi 2022). His poetic motto -summarized in "people are bad, cinema is innocent", partakes of cinema's ability to soothe the wounds of the experience of escaping Nazi Europe: the use of the family film code ensures an intimate, protected, preserved space. Family, amateur and small format films are explicitly a reference for a generation of experimental filmmakers of those years: Stan Brackage identified himself with the figure of the amateur by referring back to the family film and claiming the freedom of the small gauge; Maya Deren spoke of "films de chambre" with regard to her masterpiece *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943); and Mekas defined his works as "diaries, notes and sketches", films made for himself and a few others (Allard 1995: 119)[8].

Several anthropologists have reflected on the affinities between art, ethnography and experimentation (Marano 2013, Lusini 2013, Schneider and Pasqualino 2014, Pandian 2019). An important difference between home movies and experimental cinema, which is inspired by the codes of the reduced format, lies in the fact that family films do not claim any space of authorship as they usually have neither editing nor title; they are family archives, identified by a name, that of the author (often a man, father and husband who gives his surname to the archive), which is above all a family name[9]. Similarly, the production of family films differs from the autoethnographic approach where the dimensions of reflexivity and intentionality, historical and social contextualization and the search for a wide audience are at stake (cf. Reed-Danahy 1997; Cati and Franchin 2012; Marabello 2012). Home movies occupy a liminal space between popular production from below (with its recurring codes and subjects) and authorial production (sought-after in some cases) as almost always a single author is behind the camera. Being products of popular culture, they are complex objects for anthropology in their systematically breaking of the boundary between agent subject and represented object.

8 It is not insignificant that the way Mekas himself took notes is reminiscent of the ethnographic style, with trees and diagrams indicating connections between places, events and people. Cf. the exhibition *Jonas Mekas. Under the Shadow of the Tree*, curated by Francesco Urbano Ragazzi in collaboration with Home Movies - Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, February-March 2023, Padiglione de l'Esprit Nouveau, Bologna, Italy.

9 The people, the still-living filmmakers I managed to contact for my research, express genuine amazement at the interest their films may have aroused and even more so at being considered "authors".

This lack of authorship brings the family film closer to the style of field-notes in its character of fragmentariness, immediacy, recording of the moment. Sketches, graphs, drawings, in particular, have the capacity to replace, add to, or "bypass" the written text: suggestive and intimate, they solicit the writer, who is also the one who rereads them. They signify differently and remain in some ways a phantasmal trace for translation into a publishable and sharable writing. In this respect, the ethnographer, who takes notes or archives clippings and images, produces a suspended, "enchanted as well as enchanting" work (Taussig 2011: 33; 109). It is a testimony that is most often abandoned as unusable, but that represents that mismatch between what has been seen and witnessed and what can be communicated, which is nonetheless necessary for writing (ibid.: 73). Rather than the anthropologist as a writer, Taussig seems to suggest a figure of the anthropologist as amateur, i.e., the one who is passionate and does not necessarily fit with the canons of codified professionalism. The ethnographic sketch is also a game, as opposed to a text, which takes seriously the imponderability of the everyday. The fate of family films also hints at a connection with fieldwork notes, in that they are often abandoned, not always re-readable and relatable in the excess of detail, in the enchantment of the everyday; they are precious and at the same time resistant and never easily translatable.

"Here, elsewhere": the Paltrinieri film archive

The HomeMovies family film archive in Bologna, Italy, presents a collection of amateur and family films dating from the 1920s onwards. It provides an opportunity to reflect on this peculiar and relatively under researched visual object and engage in reflections on the oblique relationships between family films, ethnographic practice, and anthropology.

The first time the Paltrinieri film archive is presented to me (three 8mm reels and seventeen in super8 of varying lengths for a total of five hours and forty minutes), I discover that it is impossible to trace the person from a small town in the province of Modena, Massa Finalese, who brought the collection to the archives; she must have changed her telephone number. The images are fascinating, although of alternating quality, some are overexposed, some dark, as is often the case in family films. I am struck by the constant greetings to the camera, right from the first reel, where two very young girls, winking and waving, burn a sign with the words "1963" on it (Figure 1). This first reel ends with a family New Year's toast among parents, grandparents and relatives, actors who return in many of the subsequent reels.
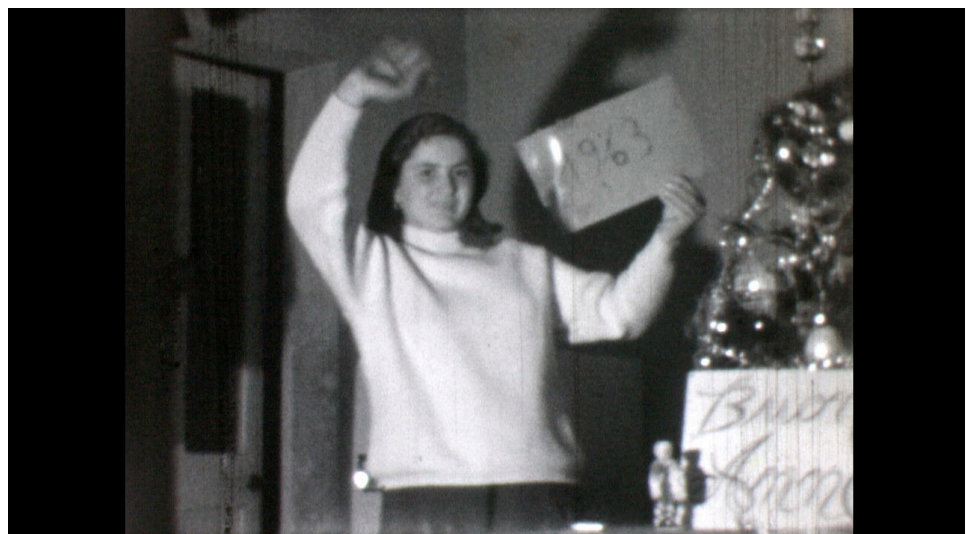

Figure 1 Maria greeting at her brother abroad

Starting from the late 1960s and early 1970s, the footage begins to literally fill up with children: christenings, fireworks, family lunches follow one another in a known code. And yet there are some surprising elements: a girl with Asian features is evidently part of the family, several reels insistently portray children playing and waving in domestic contexts, but in places that are no longer the same; they are far away, non-European places. From the indications written on the reel and reported in the archiving work, one can read words such as "Jakarta children in the backyard". Many of the shots concern a large construction site, in Indonesia, others, dated a few years later, refer to Jeddah, Arabia.

I am able eventually to understand the meaning of these films when I find the author - the village in the outskirt of Modena is small and, at the central bar, they point out to me a young woman, the granddaughter who leads me to her grandmother's house. Maria receives me with kindness, telling me, with the support of her husband present, the story of an extended family and her passion for photographs and moving images.

The conversation with those who filmed provides the key through which the documents in the Paltrinieri archive can be viewed: the space of creating a domestic intimacy in an "elsewhere". The footage filmed by Maria, who is of peasant origins, between the years '63 and '86, tells a complex story: one of movements, meetings, travels for work, of the holding of kinship relationships in time and space. Our conversation proceeds through images: a place, a moment, the people filmed acquire all the depth of intimate memory.

Maria tells me that the greetings on the first reel are addressed to her brother who had been abroad for work since he was 17, in France and then in Indonesia: she and her sister filmed on their own initiative, renting the camera so that they could send him the filmed greetings, once developed. Maria's brother worked in a French construction as a site manager: he was joined in France by Maria's husband, who started working in the same company. When the company opens a building site in Indonesia, the two men move there. Maria's brother meets and marries a French girl of Laotian origin, the daughter of a colleague, in Jakarta. After a few years, three related families join in Jakarta: Maria and her husband, her brother with his wife, and her husband's brother with his wife, all with their young children. For a couple of years, between '72 and '74, the three men are employed on the construction site of a large hotel. The families stay in a small residence next to the building site, with the use of the hotel's swimming pool, with several houses overlooking the courtyard, traversed by the incessant activities of the children, the author's favorite subject by far.

Maria bought her camera in Singapore in 1973, in continuation of her interest in photography ("the movie camera was a mirage..."[10]), where she accompanied her grandson being treated for an infection. Despite the price of the camera and film, Maria devoted herself to filming as it was a time when they could afford this luxury ("there was no shortage of money and I spent mine this way"): her husband's well-paid job, an additional monthly payment for the family away, and few expenses. "We were like lords" she tells me, smiling in a slightly embarrassed tone. Only one reel is devoted to the second working stay of the men with their families, this time in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. The shots are mainly taken from the balcony and narrate of children on bicycles, waving, planes, the giant construction site around the house. Then, a ball game between company workers, a small boat anchored to a pier built by her brother to allow the extended family to swim, just as if they were at the seaside on the Adriatic coast, back in their home country. Maria felt caged, she only managed to stay eleven months.

The grandparents' courtyard in Italy, the compound in Indonesia, the balconies in Saudi Arabia, all appear literally "filled" with humans, mainly the same children, who the viewer observes growing up during the years. These are films -full of kisses, photographic poses, pointers towards the camera, smiles- that Maria sends to Italy by mail, so that her sister can show them to her moth-

er using the projector. Mary's shootings have the peculiarity of never diverting from the family and children for too long, in a desire to communicate with the family of origin, adhering to a dominant code in home movies. There are not many visible relations with Indonesians: the living abroad is managed by the French company that provides its European employees, not surprisingly, a paracolonial separated space, with older children going to the embassy school. However, a relaxed and familiar environment is created between the three women and the domestic women workers: "the company provided you with someone who gave you a hand... not needed, but... they helped us do chores... we went to the swimming pool together... the helper of my sister-in-law learned Italian, I learned Indonesian". These young women are often filmed by Maria: "I tried to find the girl who was there with us, Sukarte, who had learned to make *tortellini*... actually she was Pakistani... I could not find her..." There are very few shots of native people outside the courtyard and those few are made from afar, with a discreet look: shots of a river where people bathe and wash clothes, where you can only guess the figures; a very short shot from the balcony of two Arab gentlemen with a child. Only a single shot, made in Indonesia, is quite close: the subject, recognizable this time, a mother with child, looks back and smiles (Figure 2).

Figure 2 In a village in Indonesia

Figure 3 Children playing in the courtyard of the holiday home in the mountains; in the background, carriers of goods.

Maria's photographic sensibility is all about children and about common and ordinary moments that happened in an exceptional space (Figure 3). I recognize in her stories the images of her films: the Indonesian holidays spent in a mountain village, Cibulan, about 300 kilometers from Jakarta, the courtyard games, an improvised tennis court, an emu ("the giant turkey as we used to call it") who lives in a cage and who, freed, runs through this garden, with her husband who challenges it, for fun, in a sort of "corrida". A small audience of natives stop to observe the family of Westerners, closed in a network that separates the residence of Cibulan from the rest of the inhabited space (Figure 4).

Figure 4 The "corrida" with the emu in the garden.

These shots are not images that have been involved by the time of the Other (Fabian 1981; Faeta 2011). In full Suharto regime, these films suggest so much about the expatriate extended family and only a little about the places they lived. Mary's years register a time of great changes in women's roles, of landscapes quickly transformed through construction sites (the luxury hotel in Jakarta, apartments in Gedda, the family new hometown in Italy), of novel opportunities through migration, of relationships between women, of growing children and the reproductive care devoted to them. In the conclusion of the interview, Maria tells me about her political commitment in her village for the defense of the environment, about the attempt to film the polar lights during a recent boat trip in northern Europe with her husband, about the Covid they both caught; she shows me her beautiful recent photos, taken with her mobile phone, a sunset and the exoskeleton of a cicada.

This unconcerted meeting, the unprepared conversation, the cheerfulness of the reminiscence and the request to understand why I am interested in family films are all elements that point to that particular spontaneity communicated by Maria's films. One wonders what the "leap" for an intimate document entails from an audience of close relatives to the interest of complete strangers. This form of "film notes" becomes a context for a past that makes room for difference, that gives meanings to the present and the future, for Maria and her children and grandchildren. And it becomes, for the listener, the approach to something we know well: family, memory, genealogy, stories of the past. Despite the fact that the story is a completely intimate, unique and private one, these images mingle with the grainy ones of our own experience. Taking up Barthes' expression "the advent of ourselves as others", family films lend themselves to being approached with an ethnographic and anthropological sensibility, through attention to detail, to different temporalities, where the "other" spaces are never completely other and never once and for all.

Maria's Indonesia is undoubtedly the reconstructed space of a courtyard and the care of children growing up, the arrival of economic prosperity, the encounter with the other seen from afar, the astonishment in front of natural landscapes, the unbroken bond with relatives in Italy. The fragmentary nature of these films is partially filled by the encounters, the conversations with those who filmed and those who were filmed, which give depth and meaning to these documents. And yet the vision and narration on these documents is precisely characterized by the impossibility of restoring the picture of events with perfect clarity, the attention to the everydayness and particularity of the moments, places and even the non-human subjects filmed (the vintage car, the children's toys, the clothing of the time, the volcano, the river, the swimming pool, the emu).

Beyond the current idea of "giving new life" to private film archives, these documents -in their being obsolete- carry precious insights allowing to question that kind of mirror device triggered by viewing these documents. A device of recognition, sharing and difference, a suspended testimony that never ceases to enchant, bore, and intrigue at once. A device that captures the memory, that recounts everyday intimacies of someone else, but still recognizable, and, in the end, for this reason, somehow disturbing as "watching oneself watch" (Sierek 1995: 63).

"Watching oneself watch": a conclusion

Sociologist Celia Lury (1998) has proposed a complex reflection on how photographic technology and its diffusion condition the perception of the self, family identity, and memory. The effects of subjectivation on which the author focuses are produced through the image at the center of a continuous process of unravelling knowledge, memory, and bodily sensations, where awareness, individuality, volition define the subject itself. The author significantly takes further Strathern's reflection on contemporary kinship by exploring it in terms of visuality. If in the "postplural" society (Strathern 1992) relationality is no longer inherent to things or people, but individuals themselves are products of strategic assemblages, Lury suggests an interpretation of contemporary subjectivity as an aftereffect of the photographic act. The "experimental individual" of contemporaneity holds together the self and the other, the private and the public, the subject and the object, the living and the past, where the photographic image plays a crucial role.

Home movies, as an outdated visual technology reflecting a representation of a self that is already past, with their lack of assertiveness, contextualization, and documentary status, in their obvious singularity, can represent a mode of looking that implies "adaptation, affinity and reciprocity between self and context in which personhood is not limited to the confines of the individual" (Lury 1998: 6). There is an inherent scalarity in home movies, as they do not show everything, but rather only "parts". Eschewing complete and accomplished transparency, these images refer to what is not seen, not filmed, and remains invisible, and what we already know: we complete the vision with our gaze that produces the memory of something we have not directly experienced. Home movies maintain a dimension that invites "promiscuous empathy" not only with other humans, but also with things, as Lury suggests with regard to photography, following Benjamin (Lury 1998: 76).

Lury's reflection concerns the identification of specific and different ways of seeing that can provide an ethical redefinition of looking, which renounces the choice between image as reflection and image as transparency, suggesting a vision that involves a possible coincidence with the referent that is also and at the same time a metamorphosis. The intractable supplement of identity mentioned by Barthes (1981: 109) is taken up by Lury when she asks: "what is the mysterious process involved here by which coincidence is also metamorphosis, not convergence of person and portrayal? Is it possible to avoid becoming what we are?" (Lury 1998: 88). Different ways of looking are

possible, a construction of partial and provisional boundaries and identifications, which can "cause the viewer astonishment, and continue to provoke the question, 'why is it that I am alive here and now?'(Barthes, 1981: 84)" (ibid. 227).

The viewing of a home movie -produced for oneself, for a few or for no one- when it becomes public, that is, when it leaves the circuit of intimacy for which the footage was produced, necessarily involves an overlapping of inactuality, marginality, nostalgia, irrelevance, identification. Watching family films refers to *what has been* that is also a *I have been*, which in some ways participates in all the visions of this document over time and up to present day. Watching family films is, as Sierek suggests, "se regarder voir" (Sierek 1995: 63). It is about the overlapping of watching, being watched and watching oneself at the same time. Relationality and relatedness are intertwined with a history of the gaze and the way of representing an "us", authentic and intimate, in a Euro-American context. These visual objects are not made to be enjoyed over time, so much so that cases of undeveloped films being found are not uncommon. Rather, they envisage a potential usability and indicate an imaginary intimate audience. Since the moment they are filmed, they already constitute an archive made of joy, light, black and white or saturated colors, blurs, nostalgia. They are memory, personal and collective at the same time.

The decay of the medium and the image partakes of the finiteness of an individual (often male, white, father, middle-class, although not always as we have seen) who lived with their intimates and who filmed and watched them: producer, subject and consumer together, of a minor and historically insignificant cultural product. The parsimony with which these documents, as small, private and collective archives, have been produced clearly distinguishes them from digital production. By definition, the family film renounces to a broad narrative and yet marks a shared moment, which is known and distant at the same time, with the capacity to show also through its undisciplined aesthetics, a "different us", a projection of a testimony, not necessarily celebratory or predatory, but rather suspended, of the places and subjects encountered.

Figure 5 Maria on a trip to the Tangkuban Perahu volcano in Indonesia, with her husband and her husband's brother, filmed by her brother.

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