APPROPRIATING MEMORIES:

HOME MOVIES AND SPATIAL MONTAGE

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Abstract: Meaning in home movies if often limited for viewers who were not involved with the original event recorded on film. However, the advent of new media technologies and grammars, together with a shift from private viewing to online, public exhibition, has enabled the home movie to be re-contextualized into a more accessible experience for a range of audiences. The emphasis on preserving memory in the home movie, together with the role of (computer) memory in a digital age, open up rich possibilities for new kinds of meaning-making when these forms intersect.

Keywords: home movies, new media, spatial montage, internet, memory

In 2009, I offered an advanced undergraduate media production course called Cinematic Multimedia at a mid-sized university in Michigan, U.S.A. The course challenged students to experiment with new developments in media language, such as remix and mash-up, motion graphics, and online cinema. One of the assignments asked students to create a work employing spatial montage, a split-screen technique defined by Lev Manovich as "involv[ing] a number of images, potentially of different sizes and proportions, appearing on the screen at the same time."[1] Importantly for these students, it was then "up to the filmmaker to construct a logic which drives which images appear together, when they appear and what kind of relationships they enter with each other"[2]. To accomplish this, students could use original footage, found commercial footage, or their own pre-existing footage. The goal for the project was to explore aesthetic patterns, thematic connections, and happy narrative accidents among simultaneous visual channels (see Figure 1).

The student projects were resoundingly smart and compelling, but I was struck most by the students who revisited their own pre-existing footage – home movies, essentially – as the base ingredients for the project. These spatial montages offered intimate, moving, and subtle glimpses into the makers' past and interior lives, even through images as quotidian as fishing along the Manistee River or traipsing along frozen Lake Michigan with friends. By providing multiple perspectives on the same event, the connections offered by playing images side-by-side at the same time produced an entirely new context for an otherwise traditional home movie.

Figure 1. Randy Szuch, *Lake Michigan*[3], 2009. Courtesy the artist.

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[1] Lev MANOVICH, *The language of new media*. Cambridge, Mass, MIT Press, 2002, p. 322.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Randy SZUCH, *Lake Michigan*. Available at: http://vimeo.com/10252675. Accessed 5/4/2013.

As Roger Odin has noted, the home movie poses a particular kind of spectatorial problem[4]. As single channel, decontextualized pieces of footage, captured because of the singular meaning the event represents to the person behind the camera, they rarely offer interior access to the memory on display to an outside viewer. Instead, for this viewer, the meaning produced by the home movie remains at surface level, solely a depiction of an event populated by strangers – hence the jokes about the drudgery of watching the neighbors' family vacation films. Much like listening to an acquaintance recount a dream, the interior emotional valances are lost in a typical living room home movie viewing. I suspect my students – active and creative filmmakers – initially hit a creative dead end with their own home videos for this reason; they shot the footage, but couldn't find a transformative use for it. Spatial montage, then, opened a new experimental venue for them to play with meaning and context. What could they do with these images to produce a spectatorial experience richer than a simple observation of an event?

The work produced by my students prompted a deeper investigation into the role of home movies in a digital, computer-based, new media context, particularly as these new media developments provide opportunities to explore memory in technological and affective forms: the memories evoked by home movies, the use of computer memory to create and display new media objects, the way computer technology preserves and organizes data into associative fragments of memory, and the way spatial montage miniaturizes images to suggest a kind of moving image "memory box." Further, the prevalence of home movies in an online, YouTube-driven context has resulted in the creative use of such amateur films to produce critical commentary and social critique in the form known as "smart montage." These innovative uses suggest that the intersection of personal, private recordings with experimental, digitally manipulated aesthetic approaches has opened a rich venue for re-contextualizing home movies for a public audience.

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[4] Roger ODIN, "Reflections on the home movie as document: A semio-pragmatic approach." In Karen L. ISHIZUKA; Patricia ZIMMERMANN (ed.). *Mining the home movie: Excavations in histories and memories,* Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008, p. 255-271.

Memories in Space and Time

Home movies almost always evoke a feeling of nostalgia, of time lost, whether they're grainy, faded Super 8, soft, mushy VHS, or even, now, pixelated YouTube videos of babies or cats. Even when they're not our own, they serve as a trigger for remembering. They're most vivid when they connect us personally, and we can share in the collective memories with family and friends, but because they so often feature moments of captured joy, of the cherished moments of childhood or family life, they nonetheless invite even strangers to take part in the process of remembering. It is because they so powerfully evoke the notion of memory, of time past, and our elusive, oblique connection to it, that their inclusion in nonlinear new media grammars such as spatial montage becomes a unique area of research and practice.

As Odin has argued in his work on home movies, these amateur films are almost by definition a private kind of memory-making experience, limited to those who participated in the original event captured onscreen. "They function less as representations," he says, "than as index inviting the family to return to a past already lived. The home movie does not communicate."[5] These films, then, break from traditional spectatorial models of narrative, in which the viewer decodes a cinematically encoded meaning. Instead, they serve as touchstones that invite the participants to remember, to dip into our their interior experiences as a means for completing the viewing experience. The images onscreen trigger other sensations related to the depicted event: emotional echoes, smells, sounds, related memories, even the embodiment of the self at a previous age. In this way, the home movie operates to "externalize the mind,"[6] to serve as a spark for a real memory – at least for those who participated in the original experience. Still, even when home movie viewing is a collective experience, as when a family watches their films and contributes their own pieces to the process of remembering, the memory is ultimately an interior, individual one. "Consequently," Odin adds, "home movies seem boring for those outside the family because outsiders lack the contextual frame that positions the disjointed images."[7] Meaning ultimately resides in the interior of the individual participant who frames and contextualizes the visual material.

For the new media artist exploring home movies, then, the question becomes how to re-imagine home movies so they offer meaning for those not involved in the original cinematic experience. Nico de Klerk, paraphrasing Eric de Kuyper, explains that the home movie, "once… separated from its original setting… tends to become a source of historical knowledge rather

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[5] *Ibid.*, 259.
[6] Lev MANOVICH, p. 74.
[7] Roger ODIN, p. 260.

than a repository of shared experience."[8] It ceases to function as an invitation to remember, and instead takes on the status of a historical artifact, an object of study. While the spectator's reception of the home movie need not be limited to that of imbibing historical knowledge – certainly, emotional and narrative cues play a role – the re-contextualizing of a home movie through new media grammars enables it to take on a resonance not as explicitly tied to the original event. Enter spatial montage.

Spatial montage, a term coined by Lev Manovich,[9] grows out of traditional, filmic montage, but in this alternative, multiple images exist in the frame at the same time rather than in temporal, sequential order. As Manovich argues in *The Language of New Media,*[10] in the digital era spatial montage has come to dominate our (tele)visual domain, with software interfaces arranged as a set of frames appearing on single computer screen, or YouTube's home page promoting multiple video choices, or cable news channels employing a multi-frame interview format. The ease of image manipulation provided by digital tools has prompted a shift from temporal organization of images and narrative to a primarily spatial one as we increasingly employ computers (and other digital devices) as our audiovisual interfaces, "multi-tasking" across windows, applications, and screens. Just as our eye drifts from the central video on a YouTube page to the Related Videos in the sidebar, spatial montage encourages the viewer to make narrative and aesthetic connections across the space of the screen – connections resulting in part from the visual design created by the maker, but largely dependent on the viewer's own proclivities and engagement. Spatial montage is the creative deployment of "audio-visual-spatial culture."[11]

As a creative approach, then, spatial montage makes use of the fragmented, partial, nonlinear imperfection of human memory – the unexpected flash to a childhood playground based on a scent, the unreliable image of a stranger encountered on a street, the dream suddenly remembered at the end of the day, the elusive word hovering on the tip of one's tongue. The audience's experience with spatial montage becomes more like that of watching a memory, rather than participating in present-tense perception: our attention is divided among the activities of the multiple frames, and we shift from watching individual images to taking in the frame as a whole. Because of this divided attention, our experience of the video is only ever partial and incomplete. The multiple images playing simultaneously enable the construction of patterns, graphic matches, repetition, and accidental associations that offer deeper access to the

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[8] Nico DE CLERK, "Home Away from Home: Private Films of the Dutch East Indies." In *Mining the Home Movie, op. cit.*, p. 150.
[9] Lev MANOVICH, p. 159, 322.
[10] *Ibid.,* p. 322 – 330
[11] *Ibid.,* p. 157.

emotional content of the memory represented onscreen. It offers the chance, for both maker and viewer, to play with parallel time and multiple simultaneous perspectives. The straightforward, historical nature of the home movie is rendered patterned, abstract, and poetic, much as a memory or even a dream. Manovich articulates the power of spatial montage to suggest memory:

> Just as we use computers to accumulate endless… data, and just as a person, going through life, accumulates more and more memories, with the past slowly acquiring more weight than the future, spatial montage can accumulate events and images as it progresses through its narrative. In contrast to the cinema's screen, which primarily functions as a record of perception, here the computer screen functions as a record of memory.[12]

Spatial montage allows audience members to mistake the structure of the maker's mind for their own.[13] The interiority of the memory is externalized.

Home movies occupy a unique place in the new media landscape, as Manovich imagines it, in other ways. Manovich is interested in the role of the database as a basis for cinematic works, and home movies are by nature entries in an ephemeral and scattered archive. Whether they're online (as many anonymous and orphaned works are), in an individual's basement or attic, or on the shelf at a thrift store, home movies are the stuff of an accidental, and vast, found footage archive. Thus, the use of home movies as found footage in new works is necessarily a form of database cinema, and the placement of these films in the form of spatial montage allows for an exploration of memory (and history) via visual and iconographic associations, rather than temporal montage, which has dominated classical and much of contemporary mainstream cinema. This use of home movies allows for a re-examination of these important films via the abstract, fragmented approach of emotional and memorial tableaux, instead of banal mini-narratives of familiar rituals. It allows for a different entry into the material, which can have historical as well as creative significance. In addition, home movies are spatial, global, and geographical in nature – they are recordings of place as well as time, as exemplified by the familiar question viewers ask when watching them: "Where is that?" Manovich notes the giving way of the primacy of temporal thinking to that of spatial modes of thought, exemplified by such concepts as "globalization" and "geopolitics"[14] and, I would add, the ubiquity of tools like Google Maps, Google Earth, GPS, etc., in the last decades of the last

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[12] *Ibid.,* p. 325.
[13] *Ibid.,* p. 61.
[14] *Ibid.,* p. 323

century. The growth of scholarly interest in home movies, appropriately, coincides with this development. Thus, the arrangement of home movies in the screen space through spatial montage invites us to explore geographic associations as well as temporal ones. In many respects, spatial montage stops time in order to explore space, providing a moving tableau rather than montage.

Former student John Shaw's project, *On the Manistee*,[15] for example, offers multiple simultaneous perspectives of the same scene of a group of young men fishing in a river, providing a kind of Cubist approach to spatial montage (see Figures 2 and 3). Although shot on video, the work evokes the nostalgic texture of the iconic Super 8 home movie format with desaturated colors and soft edges. The emphasis on divergent points of view – a blurred shot of yellow flowers, adjacent to a close up of a fishing reel, which sits diagonal to a man wading in the river in the distance – not only privileges an exploration of space over time, but seems to slow time. Time is disjointed and fragmented, and thus rendered incoherent. The piece works more as a set of impressions, privileged moments retained from the larger experience, preserved and recreated here as if projected from the mind. The spectator is positioned as mere perceiver, our eyes darting from one quotidian attraction to the next (grass, water, friend). In essence, by placing these images in a framework outside of linear narrative, this spatial montage de-dramatizes the action, favoring the lyrical experience more typical of the avant-garde, but still strongly rooted in the vernacular of the home movie. Spatial montage enables this collision – a mash-up, if you will – of cinematic approaches.
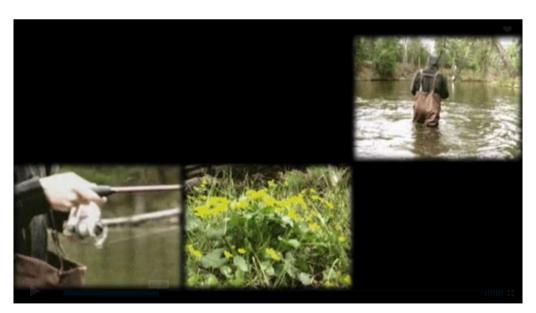

Figure 2. John Shaw, *On the Manistee*. 2009. Courtesy the artist.

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[15] John SHAW, *On the Manistee*. Available at: https://vimeo.com/10257147. Accessed 05/04/2013.

Figure 3. *Ibid*.

Framing: The Miniature

As a set of frames within a frame, then, spatial montage offers one more operation: the miniaturization of images. Spatial montage is defined by a play with frame and framing, and thus there exists a tension, once again, between interior and exterior. The computer screen frames the video which frames the videos in the montage, and the eye continuously and unpredictably moves among these nested frames. But the outside frame – the frame of the video itself – serves as the primary framing device; the interior frames are rendered smaller in order to occupy a space within this outer frame. Thus, via this framing operation, the images within the spatial montage are, relatively speaking, miniaturized.

While a diversion to a discussion of dollhouses might seem a strange turn at this juncture, the notion of the miniature, via Vivian Sobchack,[16] provides a further entry into the affective meanings produced by the convergence of home movies and spatial montage. Dollhouses are, of course, devoted to the miniature – a tiny, precious, manifestation of "real life." They exist as tiny, secret, parallel universes that we nonetheless recognize as referents to our own. But these miniatures are more than just diminutive versions of our larger world – they possess an equal, if not greater, significance to their counterparts in the "real world." They serve as powerful metaphors, but, as Gaston Bachelard suggests, "values become condensed and

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[16] Vivan SOBCHACK, "Nostalgia for a Digital Object: Regrets on the Quickening of Quicktime," in *Millennium Film Journal* 34, 1999. Available at: http://mfj-online.org/journalPages/MFJ34/VivianSobchack.html. Accessed 5/4/2013.

enriched in miniature."[17] We have to peer harder, appreciate fine details with more attention – and, importantly, we look *inside* the dollhouse. It is close-up, delicate, interior way of looking, a more intimate experience than its life-sized analogue. Or, as Sobchack puts it, "…the miniature is a compression and condensation of data in space, but phenomenologically and poetically, the compression and condensation of the miniature in space intensifies the experience and value of the 'data' and makes of it something 'rare' and 'precious,' something spatially 'condensed' yet temporally 'interiorized' and thus 'vast in its way.'"[18] The miniature, almost like a black hole, draws the world to it and explodes with meaning. The miniature contains within it a sense of secrecy and mystery. Like a toy, as Susan Stewart describes the power of miniatures, it opens "an interior world, lending itself to fantasy and privacy in a way that the abstract space… of social play… does not."[19] The miniature, in other words, provides a framing device for a world that we have to fill in with our own imaginations – it is presence and absence, interiority and exteriority at the same time.

A crucial connection between dollhouses, avant-garde cinema, and spatial montage lies, perhaps unexpectedly, in surrealistic assemblage art. Sobchack applies her characterization of the miniature to the "memory boxes" of Joseph Cornell, the mid-20th century artist who also experimented with the use of found footage as an experimental filmmaker. These assemblages of found and small objects, appropriately, are fragmented and incomplete, built on associations, suggestive rather than direct, inviting us into the interiority of an imaginary memory. They refer to cultural rituals and objects in the outside world without directly articulating them. Importantly, they also employ what Sobchack calls a "mnemonic aesthetic," a practice "based on repetition and rhythm… a variety of forms and modes such as 'rote quotation' and mnemonic clichés,; 'looping,' duplication, and cyclical recurrence or repeated uses of images, objects, and sounds; rhythmic and repetitious patterning of images, objects, sounds and music whose modes can be 'ritualistic,' 'mantric,' or 'mechanical.'"[20] These devices of *ars memoriae*, she argues, serve to keep the memory "in mind" as audio-visual mnemonics. The repetition and patterning of glass ice cubes in a Cornell work, for example, "make mysterious the most common of objects" – make them rare, precious, and hard to forget.[21] The use of such rhythm and repetition further "expresses the desire to preserve what escapes preservation, to tie the

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[17] Gaston BACHELARD, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas, Boston: Beacon Press, 1964, quoted in Vivian SOBCHACK, "Nostalgia for a Digital Object," *op. cit.*
[18] Vivian SOBCHACK, *ibid.*
[19] Susan STEWART, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984, p. 56.
[20] Vivan SOBCHACK, *ibid.*
[21] *Ibid.*

ephemeral down without undoing its ephemerality; it expresses the desire to remember."[22] The use of repetition, indeed, further extends to the establishment of ritual and tradition, key concerns of the home movie.

This digression about dollhouses and Cornell boxes leads back to the use of home movies in spatial montage. This elucidation of the power of miniatures serves to underscore the ways in which home movies are made meaningful through multi-frame expression, a collection of tiny windows into the experiences of others' narratives and lives. Home movies become the miniature fragments of cultural history within a larger "memory box," the frame of the screen. We are invited to look more carefully, into, beyond, and beneath the home movie to ferret out its secrets, its missing parts, the events not recorded for posterity – in other words, its absences. Absence, of course, is a major structuring element within home movies; Michele Citron, in her work on the form, notes that "in presenting the image of an ideal selective past, home movies announce what is absent. They stand in for what is there and what is not there. In their ambivalence they both confess and hide."[23] The intentionality behind including only specific life events in home movies highlights what is not recorded, between camera stops and starts. This rupture is made still more visible when frames are broken apart and juxtaposed against one another – the boundaries of the frames mark beginnings and ends, what existed between recordings and outside the frame. Furthermore, in spatial montage those banal events and rituals catalogued in home movies – birthday parties, Christmas mornings, Disneyland trips – are "made mysterious" through repetition and rhythm, again taking on an emotional, rather than informational, tenor. They become precious and rare, transcending the slogging ordinariness for which they are so often known. In spatial montage, audio-visual mnemonic devices – graphic matches, synchronicity, visual rhythm, etc. – further invite us to be present with the footage, seeking to identify those moments powerful enough to be worth remembering.

A few last notes on miniatures, to return to the discussion of space and time. The miniature, Sobchack argues, isn't affected only by spatial dimensions; "time," she says, "also compresses and condenses in miniature… unlike in 'real-time' and 'live-action' cinema, our sense of temporality as we engage the miniature never 'streams' toward the future."[24] Therefore, like spatial montage and much of database cinema, "the miniature always tends toward tableau rather than toward narrative, toward silence and spatial boundaries rather than toward

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[22] *Ibid.*
[23] Michelle CITRON, *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 19.
[24] Vivan SOBCHACK, *ibid.*

expository closure."[25] As Stewart says, "in the miniature, we see spatial closure posited over temporal closure" and that miniatures simultaneously particularize a single instance but are also generalized in that "that instance comes to transcend, to stand for, a spectrum of other instances."[26] One person's memory becomes universal and connected to our own. The viewer is always "trapped outside the possibility of a lived reality of the miniature," leading to a kind of nostalgia for the event it refers to. The miniature also is decidedly non-narrative. While memories can often take on narrative elements, especially in the recounting and retelling, they are, in a private, interior way, impressions and fragments, existing without closure. Thus, the miniaturization of home movies in spatial montage enables a palimpsest of memories and the evocation of memory through the movies themselves and *the ways in which they are framed*.

Home Movies in Smart Montage

So far, the works under discussion largely involve a filmmaker revisiting their individual experiences through the manipulation of their own home movies or, at least, their family's home movies. Such works explode these films into multiple frames to provide a new path into the visual material, into the memories shared by the filmmaker. These are personal works with which the filmmaker is intimately associated; there's a direct link between maker and memory. However, much contemporary work with home movies in a spatial montage format appropriates home movies into a critical context, pitting images against each other rather than seeking a kind of harmonious whole.

Coined by Brigid Maher, "smart montage" describes the contemporary blending of digital techniques such as spatial montage with the goals of intellectual montage outlined by filmmaker and montage theorist Sergei Eisenstein. In other words, smart montage uses new media grammars and, often, found footage, to create a critical, dialectical statement. In this use of found footage, conflict, collision and dissonance drive the associations between images, as in the recent trend of video mashups – works that use "multiple source materials to create new and powerful social or intellectual statements using digital video, which is often then posted to the web."[27] Like the aims of Eisensteinian montage, these works produce a synthetic meaning greater than the sum of their parts, often in the form of critical commentary on popular media

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[25] Susan STEWART, *On Longing*, quoted in Sobchack, "Nostalgia for a Digital Object," *op.cit.*
[26] Susan STEWART, *On Longing*, p. 48.
[27] Brigid MAHER, "Smart Montage: The New Mobile Dialectic." In *The Journal of the International Digital Media and Arts Association,* 7.1, 2010, p. 32

culture. With roots in Situationist pranks and culture jamming, mashups employ techniques of détournement to critique media products. The use of home movies in a smart montage context – multiple, disparate "memories" side-by-side in spatial montage, especially those that feature similar activities, events, gestures, or locations, generating the repetition and rhythm of the mnemonic aesthetic – can create dissonance, contrasts, and gaps that result in synthetic critique.

Jonathan Caouette – *Tarnation*

As a documentary that makes extensive use of found footage, home movies, and pop culture bricolage, Jonathan Caoutte's *Tarnation* (2003)[28] frequently employs spatial montage and repetition to suggest the fragmentation of his own life and childhood as well as of his mother's mental illness (see Figure 3). Throughout the film, he processes and understands his own life experiences through extensive use of home movies and his mediated relationship to popular culture. In one particular scene, spatial montage captures the incoherent chaos of his struggle to understand his position in life, with frames alternately presenting his home movies and images from popular (and obscure films). No particular type of film occupies any single frame; commercial and personal footage leap from right to left, top to bottom. The miniaturized images contained within the larger film frame thus fold time upon itself, creating a tableau of references that leap across eras in pop culture and in Caouette's own autobiographical narrative. The "stream toward the future" of conventional autobiography comes to a halt in this application of spatial montage, functioning more like a flattened, exploded palimpsest in which past and future, influence and influenced, are indistinguishable. The effect is to place the home movie footage on the same plane and status as the dramatic works, confusing "truth" and fiction in the montage.

The juxtaposition – the mashup – creates a dialectic in which Caouette positions his own home movies and his (melo)dramatic lip-synching performance against rather bizarre and often horrific cinematic images. The innocence – and normalcy – of the home movies is betrayed by the fragmentation and chaos of the surrounding frames, foregrounding the absence in those home movies – the behind-the-scenes events that shape the bigger picture. The image of his mother, smiling and at peace, unravels in its collision with footage of women under distress, grimacing under terrifying, high-contrast lighting. The image of Caouette lip-synching matches the lighting, so that even when we see him as an unspoiled child, we know that he is haunted by

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[28] *Tarnation,* DVD, directed by Jonathan Caouette, New York City, NY, Wellspring Media, 2005.

his mother's psychosis and the possibility that he, too, might become that maddened mother in the end. By fusing these miniature frames of his own life with imagery of his obsessions from popular culture, Caouette offers us access to the interiority of his adolescent experience – it is only across and through the gaps created in the juxtapositions between images that the full range of disruption in his life becomes apparent. It's an invitation to mistake Caouette's interiority for our own. The evocation of the miniature in these sequences of smart montage underscore that Caouette's story is ultimately about process, not closure; about healing, if not necessarily forgiveness. Smart montage, therefore, uses references to outside images from culture to create bridges of meaning between the frames that thereby frame the larger film.

Figure 4. *Tarnation,* DVD, directed by Jonathan Caouette, New York City, NY: Wellspring Media, 2005.

Elliott Malkin – Home Movie Reconstructions

If works that feature single sets of home movies existing in at least somewhat similar spaces and time have a centripetal force of meaning, a force that creates a coherence of the disparate parts, *Family Movie*[29] works in a centrifugal way, with meaning radiating outward from the core. In this piece, filmmaker Elliott Malkin uses the technique of "rephotography" to create "home movie reconstructions," that is, he re-creates the footage filmed by his parents as home movies in 1974 – thirty years later (see Figures 4 and 5). Dad sunbathing poolside, Mom playing with a toddler, a little kid at the beach are all remade in their original locations with their original stars, now thirty years older, and played alongside the originals. Clearly, this video is directly concerned with gaps and intersections of time and space. Malkin, in discussing this film, described the "depersonalization" he felt in watching his parents' home movies – seeing himself as a toddler onscreen but not being able to identify with his own image.[30] With this piece, he sets out, in part, to reinsert himself in the remembering process, though, in doing so, he places himself behind the camera rather than onscreen. Thus, we get an attempt, once again, to externalize a mental state – Malkin invites us into his own internal process of sorting through his relationship to his memories, as seen through his own eyes.

However, viewers of this piece – strangers – have expressed the emotion and sadness they feel watching the film, a reaction that results in part from the utilization of smart montage.[31] As Maher has noted, smart montage employs a "narrative dissonance aesthetic" in which the form "creates an emotional reaction as a sum of all images meant to be read as a discontinuous whole."[32] This video deliberately creates dissonance between images so that meaning emerges from the ruptures, from that which is not depicted. The use of repetition and rhythm in the mnemonic aesthetic of these side-by-side "memory boxes" of miniature images asks us to think about all the variables missing from the pattern – if these moments are worth preserving, and therefore remembering, what was missed? What was deliberately not recorded? With this use of smart montage, absence is foregrounded, and we are presented with the danger that memories fade and slip away. Malkin provides us this attempt to remember before it's too late, and to insert himself into these memories as a way of forestalling their loss.

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[29] Elliott MALKIN, *Family Movie,* Available at: http://lostinlight.org/2007/01/16/family-movie/. Accessed 5/4/2013. See also *Home Movie Reconstructions,* an alternative presentation of the film http://dziga.com/home-movie-reconstructions/).
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] mathowie, "Home Movie Reconstructions 1974 / 2004," *Metafilter.* Available at: http://www.metafilter.com/83135/Home-Movie-Reconstructions-1974-2004. Accessed 18/2/2103.
[32] Brigid MAHER, *ibid.,* p. 29.

Loss, too, is a major element of this piece, and the sadness some viewers feel also stems from home movies' tendency toward recording moments of joy and happiness that are clearly long past. The parallel placement of the "authentic" recordings and the newly "staged" recordings powerfully depict the passage of time – the sense, as Manovich puts it, that the past has acquired more weight than the future[33]. But this spatial organization, or spatio-temporal organization, also calls out the artificiality of the recorded memory – it's a kind of critique of home movies themselves. The staging of the reconstructions, which are so painfully (and delightfully) artificial, calls into question the authenticity of any of these recordings, which are ultimately acted and performed. So, again, it's all about loss – loss of the original experiences which were only questionably authentic to begin with. Likewise, as a kind of modern, moving stereo card, the faded, fuzzy, muted images of the 8mm movies seem to recede into the background like old memories themselves, while the crisp, smooth, detailed, digital video has a powerful sense of presence and present time, and shifts into the foreground. An artificial depth is created as disparate moments in time and space coalesce. The video uses the collisions afforded by smart montage to explore space and time in content while also reflecting critically on the content itself.

Figure 5. Elliott Malkin, *Family Movie*, January 16th, 2007. Available at:
http://lostinlight.org/2007/01/16/family-movie/. Courtesy the artist.

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[33] Lev MANOVICH, *ibid.* p. 325.

Figure 6. *Ibid.*

Wreck and Salvage – *America, Your America*

The stuff that constitutes "home movies" in the era of YouTube needs interrogation and fine-tuned definition outside the scope of this discussion. However, certain videos uploaded to YouTube nonetheless resemble traditional 8mm and VHS home movies – family events, cultural rituals, travelogues, and so on: those videos that are fleeting, hastily recorded, and amateur-produced. Such videos in a Web 3.0 world depart starkly from their earlier counterparts, however, in that such home movies have migrated from what was once a distinctively private practice to one that is unabashedly public and, arguably, collective. Home movies are posted online not just for family and friends, but for strangers around the world, and, as such, the mode of address of the home movie is shifting as well. The public home movie on YouTube means that the process of shooting such an amateur video is no longer confined to the private, but becomes a part of a collective experience – we are aware of the context and audience for which we're shooting, and we shoot to be a part of the collective online experience of video sharing. Hence we shoot those monuments we know have been shot a million times before so that we can contribute to the community and post as public evidence that we've been there. Once again, we witness the drive to record experiences AS memory – the recording IS the memory. Thus, YouTube itself becomes a database of "rephotography" and collective remembering, a repository of memory boxes. Manovich notes that on the computer, once a file is created, it's very difficult to ever delete it fully, so that "in 'meatspace' we have to work to

remember, [but] in cyberspace we have to work to forget."[34] YouTube, then is a natural storehouse for memories we don't want to lose. Maher points out the public nature of smart montage as well. As a technique in widespread use by remix culture, it relies on public access to found footage and a public audience to witness its critique. Online home movies – in this case, travelogues – thus serve as one expected target of remix and mashup.

The online video series *America, Your America* by Aaron Valdez, a member of the online remix collective Wreck and Salvage[35], mashes together travel videos of iconic American destinations. Three installments focus on videos recorded at a specific location and uploaded to YouTube – San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, the carvings of presidential busts at Mount Rushmore, Arizona's spectacular natural features at Grand Canyon – to play with the repetition, accidental synchronicity, and rhythm of the mnemonic aesthetic that emerges from so many near-identical pieces of footage. In the case of *Golden Gates*,[36] (see Figure 6), dozens of similar documents of the towering arches recorded while driving across the bridge play next to each other. The video operates as an exploration of visual design via spatial montage, but, again, the gaps and differences between these multiple perspectives contain the critique. The piece comments on the very phenomenon of making the personal public, of showcasing the banal. In its vast multiplicity – the sheer number of miniatures in this memory box – we become aware of how public our private lives have become. Indeed, this piece visualizes the database of home movies, rendering in graphic form the public and collective memory. Of course, it pokes fun too, pointing out the ridiculousness of the cultural impetus to record the same image, over and over: the hubris of believing we, as individuals, even in this globalized world, are somehow unique. The video, literally, cuts those makers down to size, miniaturizing their efforts, reminding them of their own futility. Again, we experience an aura of loss – a loss of the ego (and the ego ideal, so celebrated in cinema spectatorship) – but there remains, in tension, a celebration of the collective experience. The dissonance, here, erupts precisely from the mnemonic aesthetic, where the slight differences among "sameness" provide the collisions. In its quotation of "artifacts of cultural memory,"[37] the video souvenirs of the bridge, the piece is about the very notion of duplication and reproduction that partly defines new media and the digital age. And, of course, we can think of the entirety of YouTube – even the entirety of video on the web – as one great spatial montage, or at least work of database cinema, and thus this video serves as a meta-montage, a montage of the YouTube montage.

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[34] Lev MANOVICH, *ibid.*, p. 63.
[35] Aaron VALDEZ, *America, Your America*, Available at: http://www.aaronvaldez.com/category/america-your-america/. Accessed 18/2/2013.
[36] *Id.*, Available at: http://www.aaronvaldez.com/golden-gates/. Accessed 18/2/2013.
[37] Vivian SOBCHACK, *ibid.*

Figure 7. Aaron Valdez, *Golden Gates,* Available at: http://www.aaronvaldez.com/golden-gates/. Accessed 18/2/2013. Courtesy the artist.

Forging New Memories

Home movies as a text, as an instance of cinema's imperative to represent a "present," which is always already the past, is a unique site for investigating meaning-making in new media, and particularly spatial and smart montage. Smart montage, as a fusion of techniques that favor explorations of time and space along with social critique, serves as a powerful approach to a new media practice that unravels the still-new fields of creative applications of home movies and home movie scholarship. The device warrants further exploration as a portal into investigations of memory. This is a call for more.

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