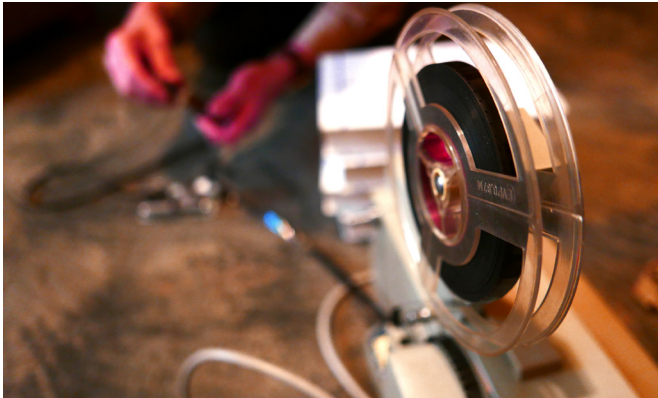# Analyzing the Familiar:
Approaches to Home Movies from East Germany

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Doing film elicitation: A projector is being prepared for screening in the presence of the researcher.

Introduction

Home movies are often over- or underexposed.[1] They show snapshots of vacations, and then suddenly jump to a family celebration. Unknown people wave to the camera or speak directly to the audience, but remain silent because there is no sound. Footage with this familiar aesthetic was shot on 8 mm between the 1930s and 1980s and on Super 8 from the 1960s until the 1980s. Such movies were neither produced by famous artists nor screened for

political reasons. In the beginning, this expensive technology was predominantly used by middle-class people to document family events.[2] With the growing global prosperity after the Second World War, from the 1950s onward narrow-gauge devices became mass commodities in the United States, Japan, and Western Europe. For more than fifty years, people around the globe preserved their lives on celluloid under changing political and cultural circumstances.

But it was not just in liberal consumer societies that families recorded vacations and rites of passage. Home cameras and projectors were also available in socialist societies like the German Democratic Republic (GDR).[3] Due to shortages in supply and shifting priorities in the centrally planned economy, 8 mm and Super 8 cameras and projectors were not a bestseller in the GDR. Whereas 18 percent of US households owned a camera in the early 1970s, at the height of Super 8, the figure for East German households stood at just 2.7 percent.[4] Nonetheless, narrow-gauge devices were sold in the GDR from the late 1950s until the 1980s, because they symbolized modern ideas of family, consumption, and technology. East German advertisements popularized these devices with images of nuclear families filming abroad and then screening their movies at home; this was a transnational iconography of technological consumerism.[5] Despite the unfree press and suppression of political opposition, politicians wanted the GDR to be recognized internationally as an industrialized country, which included the use of visual recording devices in people's leisure time, a technology that enabled them to express themselves visually outside the state's sphere of influence. It is an intriguing contradiction that people were offered an individual content production device

2. Martina Roepke, *Privat-Vorstellung: Heimkino in Deutschland vor 1945* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2006), 213–217.

3. I received digital copies of these collections thanks to a public call in 2014 and 2015. The exploration of such sources was part of my Ph.D. research *Family Film in the GDR*. In there, I analyzed visual practices beyond socialist institutions.

4. BArch DL 102/859: Institute for Marktresearch, "Die Entwicklung des Bedarfs an Konsumgütern der Warengruppe Foto-Kino-Fotochemie bis zum Jahr 1980." (Teilstudie II: Foto – Kino – Geräte. Plan-Nr. 4.27/74) vom 30. Dezember 1974, Tab. 22 „Internationaler Vergleich der Haushaltsausstattung mit Kinoaufnahmegeräten (Stand 1972), 27 & 46. The actual percentage of those using a camera was probably higher, as many owners were regularly lending them to friends.

5. My assertation that cameras resembled modernity in state socialist advertisement resulted from the visual discourse analysis, which I adapted in my research. In there, I compared 4 commercials, 247 ads, 53 brochures und 63 images of window stores all addressing home moviemakers in the GDR. These images circulated in public and private. The analysis of serial produced images revealed social conventions in the representation of family, leisure and cultural changes of visibility and invisibility. I coded the images in a data analysis program and clustered them into various keywords, some of which appeared in different clusters, as images are ambiguous. For this research method, see: Silke Betscher, "Bildsprache. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer Visuellen Diskursanalyse," in Franz Eder, Oliver Kühschelm and Christina Linsboth (eds.), *Bilder in historischen Diskursen* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2014), 63–83.

under a dictatorship, and yet historians and media scholars have overlooked such sources in the last decades.[6] If historians want to understand socialist societies in the twentieth century, they need to consider not only their distinguishing features, but also their similarities to Western societies. Accordingly, they should examine modern cultural and economic developments in countries like the GDR.

Why this reservation among scholars? One reason is due to the characteristic features of home movies, which French film scholar Roger Odin concisely describes as follows:

> *Nothing resembles a home movie as much as another one. […] The same ritual ceremonies (marriage, birth, family meals, gift-giving), the same daily scenes (a baby in his mother's arms, a baby having a bath), the same vacation sequences (playtime on the beach, walks in the forest) appear across most home movies. With such repetitions, discouragement and lassitude sometimes overtake spectators, weakening informational value.[7]*

If Odin were right, then research on home movies would be more than merely challenging for historians. What purpose would there be in analyzing such sources, if hardly any social, cultural, or political differences are visible when comparing home movies from the US, France, the UK, West Germany, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, or East Germany? However, Odin contradicts himself in the same article. If we were to watch the home movies of Eva Braun without having any further information, he claims, Adolf Hitler would appear to be a sympathetic elderly man, who regularly wears uniforms, likes playing with his dog, and jokes around with visitors against the backdrop of mountain scenery.[8] However,

6. Tepperman has recently pointed out, that the interest in media studies on „amateur cinema" is growing considerably as publications and conferences appear regularly. See: Charles Tepperman, "The Complex Materiality of Amateur Cinema Research: Texts, Archives and Digital Methods. Introduction," *Screen* 61, no. 1, (2020): 119. However, "amateur cinema" is often used as a generic term for any non-professional film production. This often leads to confusions as amateur movies differ when produced in an organized club with 16 mm equipment or at home with an 8 mm camera. See also: Ralf Forster, *Greif zur Kamera, gib der Freizeit einen Sinn: Amateurfilm in der DDR* (München: edition text + kritik, 2018), 10. Ryan Shand, "Theorizing Amateur Cinema. Limitations and Possibilities," *The Moving Image* 8, no. 2 (2008): 55–56.

7. Roger Odin, "Reflections on the Family Home Movie as Document. A Semio-Pragmatic Approach," in Karen L. Ishizuka and Patricia R. Zimmermann (eds.), *Mining the Home Movie. Excavations in Histories and Memories* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2008), 261.

8. Odin, "Reflections," 262.

this very example illustrates that not all home movies are alike, simply because these are not some orphan films of just any home moviemaker. Eva Braun was the partner of the German dictator, the man chiefly responsible for the Holocaust, whose visitors were mostly mass murderers. So what distinguishes these film reels from other home movies is the context: a vacation movie from the US is not the same as a vacation movie from the GDR.

Thus, one challenge for historians in the case of home movies is the lack of contextual information. This is why historians, even when doing visual history, privilege written sources. Home moviemakers generally did not produce or leave behind any reliable information on the production or reception of their movies. At most, the title of a film roll implies a certain interest on the part of its creator. This is why the first historical study of home movies was a discourse analysis of American amateur moviemaking guides by Patricia Zimmermann, in which she argued that an idealization of the nuclear family reduced the potential for using cameras and projectors as a medium of social criticism.[9]

There are also other factors that explain the lack of historical research on home movies. One reason is the very rudimentary methodological toolbox: scholars usually apply film analysis to professional feature films, not to moving snapshots. Anthropologist Richard Chalfen argues that professional movies address a mass audience using codes that are comprehensible by the majority of viewers, what he calls the "mass mode." Home movies, by contrast, only address a small circle of relatives and friends, who are familiar with the people and activities on screen. This is why aesthetic codes of the "mass mode" seem unnecessary, as viewers understand the meaning of the

9. Patricia R. Zimmermann, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Films* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 4.

images due to their relation to their creator. Thus, the "home mode of pictorial communication" is influenced by social norms, not by aesthetic conventions.[10] This became a comforting reason for scholars to ignore the redundant pictures of similar rituals and similar vacation sequences.

Years later, this aesthetic turned home movies into images of "authenticity" when used in documentaries. Jaimie Baron describes the impact of home movie footage in TV broadcasts as the "archive effect." The audience regards the blurry home movie footage as an authentic historical document because it differs from the high-definition recordings of professional filmmakers. Additionally, viewers are familiar with the "intentional disparity," as this footage was originally intended for personal rather than public perception.[11] This makes the unprofessional productions appear more truthful, because there would have been little reason to fake them. This has sparked an ongoing debate about whether home movies should be considered authentic or fiction. Historians have generally preferred to avoid such ambiguous sources.[12]

This factor is connected to another: Silent images are polyvalent. Thus, it is challenging for historians to grasp the essential significance of these movies. Their meanings change considerably depending on the time, place, and audience of the screening. Ashley Smith's study of "archival home movies" found that former family movies stored in an archive acquired the status of visual narratives of regional identity.[13]

In Germany, most archives lack the financial and technological resources to collect home movies. Since archives play a key role in the work of historians, their

10. Richard Chalfen, *Snapshot Versions of Life* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987), 8. Alexandra Schneider argued in her study on Swiss home movies that home movies alluded narrative and aesthetics of feature film. Yet, she analyzed rather ambitious amateur films, which differed to those I analyzed in my Ph.D. that were rather considered to be snapshots. See, Alexandra Schneider, „*Die Stars sind wir*": *Heimkino als filmische Praxis* (Marburg: Schüren Verlag, 2004), 31–32.

11. Jamie Baron, *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (London & New York: Routledge, 2014), 5–7.

12. Michelle Citron, *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 17–19.

13. Ashley Smith, *The Archival Life of Home Movies: Regional Reflections and Negotiated Visions of a Shared Past* (Dissertation: Stockholm University, 2018), 158.

research will at the very least be impeded if there are almost no institutions collecting home movies. There is no central archive for vernacular films. Only some regional archives feel a responsibility to collect home movies, often focusing on questions of local identity.[14]

With regard specifically to East Germany, the video platform Open Memory Box collected and digitized over 400 hours of home movies from the GDR, which were uploaded in September 2019.[15] However, the project was funded by the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship; this is not a film archive but a private production company that is not bound by federal or regional archival laws, nor is it obliged to store them for posterity and allow access to researchers, as required by archival laws in Germany.[16]

This discrepancy is due to the fact that public funding bodies are typically interested in political topics such as dictatorship and oppression under socialism, whereas home movies appear to downplay or ignore the totalitarian character of the GDR. This leads us to the final reason for the lack of historical research on East German home movies: namely, that what historians expect from East Germany is a politicized visual culture. They regard categories such as image propaganda or censorship as adequate to describe visuality under state socialism. On this view, images either idealized political conditions or criticized them, at the risk of being banned.[17] Overexposed Super 8 movies do not fit the standard mold of state-funded research into issues of dictatorship.

Nowadays, however, conditions are changing. This is due to the spread of digital media in both everyday life

14. As part of the International Home Movie Days, the LWL-Medienzentrum (Münster) collected in 2012 home movies from Westphalia. Currently a Ph.D. research is analyzing this material. See, Michael Geuenich, *Familie & Film: Familienbilder und Alltagspraxen des privaten Familienfilms in der BRD der 1950er bis 1980er Jahre*, Institut für Kulturanthropologie/Europäische Ethnologie, accessed February 17, 2020, https://www.visualhistory.de/en/project/familiefilm/. In 2018, a cooperation of cultural and touristical institutions published the collection call „Schmelztiegel Ruhrgebiet – Alltag schreibt Geschichte – Filmmaterial der 1950er bis 1980er Jahre gesucht!" (lit. Ruhr region melting pot – everyday life makes history – wanted footage from the 1950s to the 1980s) searching for home movies on everyday life in the German Region Ruhr. "Schmelztiegel Ruhrgebiet", Regionalverband Ruhr (RVR), accessed February 18, 2020, https://www.interkultur.ruhr/familienfilm. This development is also related to the annually held international Home Movie Days, which stimulated an awareness for home movies as cultural heritage. See, Center for Home Movies, accessed July 28, 2020, https://www.centerforhomemovies.org/hmd/. An exception on an international level is the Family Film Archive in Bologna managed by the Home Movie Association. See, L'Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia, accessed July 28, 2020, https://homemovies.it/.

15. "Open Memory Box," Open Memory Box, accessed February 17, 2020, http://open-memory-box.de/

16. Bundesarchivgesetz (BArchG) March 10, 2017, § 1, Abs. 2.

and research. In addition, there is growing interdisciplinary cooperation with media and memory studies.[18] Consequently, there is also an increasing desire to investigate media, as (visual) remnants not only transmit the past, but also reshape it, altering the meaning of memory, history, and past with each usage: "Mediated memory objects never represent a fixed moment; they serve to fix temporal notions and relations between past and present".[19]

This awareness of the interrelationship between media and history provides the point of departure for the present essay, in which I contribute empirical examples from my doctoral research on home movies from East Germany. I will discuss challenges and opportunities that arise from combining methods of film studies, history, and anthropology (specifically, film analysis, analysis of written sources, and film interviews). I apply these methods to a range of different sources (private movie collections, manuals, guides, and interviews with former home moviemakers) pertaining to home moviemaking in the GDR.

I argue that this combined approach is rewarding in the case of vernacular filmmaking as it reveals sociocultural dynamics under dictatorship that are often underappreciated by visual historians. Furthermore, it allows researchers to avoid any preconceptions before having analyzed the imagery. Finally, it can fill in some of the gaps left by the home moviemakers, since I propose an analytic approach that investigates the interrelationship between technology, image production, and reception on the one hand and popular culture and oral memory on the other. Its goal is to understand a historical image culture and to connect the images to their original

17. Claus Löser generalized artistic 8 mm- and Super 8-moviemaking as political acts because they were produced outside the official state film industry. He argued, due to their illegal origin they questioned power and hierarchy in the GDR. Claus Löser, *Strategien der Verweigerung: Untersuchungen zum politisch-ästhetischen Gestus unangepasster filmischer Artikulationen in der Spätphase der DDR* (Berlin: DEFA-Stiftung, 2011), 12–14.

18. See, Tim van der Heijden, *Hybrid Histories: Technologies of Memory and the Cultural Dynamics of Home Movies, 1895–2005* (Universiteit Maastricht, PhD, 2018), 15–16.

19. José van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 17.

cultural and political environment. My question is not what was allowed to be filmed in private in the GDR or prohibited by the state, but rather what representations of family and leisure were shaped, reproduced, and altered by the moviemakers and their cameras. In what way were the movies interlinked with socialist ideals or global images of family and leisure? What statements were made about home movies under changing political circumstances during the almost forty years of the GDR's existence? What memories did these images stimulate?

"Nothing resembles a home movie as much as another one"? Analyzing Home Movies

During a family vacation to Bulgaria in the summer of 1981, Herr Schmidt* visited an open market, which he recorded on a color film reel. At the start of the sequence, he pans the camera over a wide range of stalls, booths, and a crowd of tourists meandering through the alleys. The film then jumps to several shots of the goods on offer. In a full shot, he emphatically focuses on jeans hanging on a clothes rack. Several subsequent close-ups bring the brands into focus: *Wrangler* and *Levi's*. This recording is followed by a long shot of a white motorcycle in front of a booth. Another close-up reveals the brand of the Japanese manufacturer, *Honda*. None of it seems accidental. Herr Schmidt had many options how to film the market, but chose to focus on the brands of selected goods.[20] At that time, Bulgaria was a relatively liberal Eastern Bloc state, where East German vacationers could access a variety of Western commodities that were unavailable in the GDR.[21] The recordings can be understood as a visual collection of foreign souvenirs. But aside from being a filmic document of an exotic locale, what else does this sequence represent?

20. Home movie collection Schmidt*, "Siófok," color, 1981, no time data.

21. Manfred Schmidt and Peter Schubert, "Die Beziehungen der DDR zu Bulgarien und Albanien," in Siegfried Bock, Ingrid Muth, Hermann Schwiesau (eds.) *Alternative deutsche Außenpolitik? DDR-Außenpolitik im Rückspiegel II* (Münster: LIT-Verlag, 2006), 80.

To answer this question, I approached the home movies by adapting methods of film analysis, since there are indications in the above-described sequence that home movies should be understood as a media of visual communication. Instead of being unplanned and impulsive, "filmmaking practice is a form of 'crafting'".[22] There is a simple explanation for why this was the case in the above example: these were color film recordings, which were extremely expensive, hard to get in the GDR, and lasted only approximately three minutes per reel. Herr Schmidt must have given at least some thought to economic considerations, which led to him being judicious about pushing the record button.

How did I go about analyzing the home movies? First, I watched the fifteen digitized home movie collections (twenty-eight hours of film material) at least twice each. After that, I coded the material into sequences so as to obtain a structured overview of the material. Each sequence — defined as a unit of camera shots in the same place with the same people, ending when the film cuts to a different location or people — was documented in writing, supplemented with details about the places, participants, events, and aesthetics, such as shots, angles, zooms, and pans.[23] Second, as far as possible, I dated each movie and ordered the sequences chronologically within each movie collection. Afterwards, I began clustering sequences thematically, such as school enrollments, baptisms, and birthday parties. This allowed me to compare the structure and aesthetics of similar topics in different movie collections.

These results were then included in the final stage, the film analysis itself. If we recognize that home moviemaking was a deliberate, creative process, not an accidental,

22. Martina Roepke, "Crafting Life into Film: Analysing Family Fiction Films from the 1930s," in Ryan Shand and Ian Craven (eds.), *Small-Gauge Storytelling: Discovering the Amateur Fiction Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 86.

23. Knut Hickethier, *Film- und Fernsehanalyse* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2007), 33–36. Helmut Korte, *Einführung in die Systematische Filmanalyse* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2010), 58–59. Ina Merkel, "Historisch-kritische Filmanalyse," in Christine Bischoff, Karoline Oehme-Jüngling, and Walter Leimgruber (eds), *Methoden der Kulturanthropologie* (Köln: Böhlau, 2014), 267.

haphazard one, then we will understand that cameras and movies are more than just neutral recording tools.[24] Rather, shooting and projecting stimulated certain sociocultural dynamics in East Germany that contradicted socialist ideals of equality. In this final stage, I therefore searched for such dynamics using clusters such as those described above. One of these dynamics was individualization. I will flesh out my argument with three empirical examples — the representation of brands, pop culture, and family vacations, respectively — which demonstrate that the recording and projecting devices reveal social distinctions within socialism.

As already mentioned above, it was extremely difficult for East Germans to gain access to Western commodities. To own, eat, drink, or wear them became a huge privilege. There were three options, most of which depended on having relatives in the West: *Westpakete* (packages sent by Western relatives), visits from Western relatives, or access to West German D-marks to buy foreign commodities in "Intershops," a chain of stores in the GDR.[25] In the mid-1980s, a group of relatives from Hamburg (West Germany) visited the Krügers at a farm in East Germany. Frau Krüger recorded this rare occasion on a color film reel.[26] The first sequence shows the arrival of the relatives in a Mercedes. Frau Krüger does a long pan across the farmyard as the West German car enters, followed by several close-ups of the *Mercedes*: the Hamburg license plate, the vehicle registration code D for West Germany, and finally the car's brand symbol, the *Mercedes* star, atop the engine hood (fig. 1). The camera then jumps to a long shot of the car surrounded by family members cautiously examining the front and back. Meanwhile, an East German *Trabant* in the far rear of the farmyard is totally ignored by the filmmaker and observers. The

24. Based on the theoretical elaborations of José van Dijck on "mediated memories," I consider home movies to be a media that not only depicts certain events but is also involved in the process of shaping the meaning of the events. See, van Dijck, *Mediated Memories*, 21.

25. Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis: Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau, 1999), 243–246.

26. Home movie collection Krüger, "Männer im Ausbau," color, 1986, 04:36 min.

West German car was made the star of this home movie.

Figure 1. The arrival of West German relatives in a Mercedes Benz. The East German Trabant in the back is almost invisible.

Analyzing other home movies from East Germany, I found even more Western commodities. It became obvious that these goods were made special in part by the camera itself and the way they were filmed. There were many scenes of Christmas and Easter presents from West Germany being unwrapped. While the unwrapping was generally recorded in a wide shot, showing both the person unwrapping the gift and the gift itself, the filmmakers also included close-ups of the Western brands, such as Easter eggs from *Ferrero* or a bag with the logo of the West German supermarket chain *Edeka*.[27] The close-ups turn these commodities into special objects. By connecting them to the moviemaker's family they also help make the families individually distinguishable. This effect is reinforced by being able to screen the recordings of families with western commodities over and over again.

In the 1970s, with the delayed introduction of Super 8, cameras became cheaper in the GDR, and there was a greater range on offer thanks to imports from the Soviet

27. Home movie collection Diedrich*, "Ostern 1977," part of the film reel "Schnipsel 1976–1981," color, 1976–1981, 22:31 min. Home movie collection Krüger, "Weih-nachten," color, 1972–1982, 17:18 min.

Union.[28] This meant that teenagers could afford cameras as well, with the result that a new category of images began to appear in East German home movies: symbols of international pop culture.[29] The young Stahlmann used his first black and white film reel to record a West German TV show about the Swedish band ABBA, filming the television with a camera mounted on a tripod. Following this sequence, he pans the camera across the interior wall of his room, on which various posters can be seen. Then he jumps to a close-up, filming details of the images: the guitarist of *Deep Purple*, several images of the rock band *The Sweet*, and the West German entertainer Michael Schanze being embraced by a Minnie Mouse mascot (fig. 2).[30] These shots highlight transnational markers of the 1970s youth generation. Filming these symbols in East Germany also meant being part of this international pop culture, despite the political divisions at that time, and allowed the filmmaker to distance themselves from the cultural offerings of the socialist youth organization.

Figure 2. A poster of the West German entertainer Michael Schanze embraced by a Minnie Mouse mascot recorded on an East German film reel.

Finally, dynamics of individualization also appeared in travel movies. When on vacation, East Germans had to choose between state-organized trips, which usually

included accommodation at a state-funded vacation home, or privately organized trips to campsites.[31] Films of the latter sort included home-abroad scenes, such as preparing and cooking food, eating, and cleaning the dishes. These scenes show everyday routines, which were usually not depicted in movies shot at home. However, comparable scenes are absent in films of state-funded vacations,[32] which feature barely any interior recordings of state hotels but rather scenes of hiking, city trips, or relaxing at the beach (fig. 3). This renders the state support for these vacations invisible, and the choice of perspective and subjects serves to individualize and privatize the state-funded vacations.[33]

Figure 3. A little girl playing at the beach. Scenes shot during a state funded vacation trip.

All these examples suggest that filming devices enabled moviemakers to make social difference visible and supposed equality invisible. It was not the East German *Trabant* that was given visual attention by being made the subject of multiple shots, but the *Mercedes-Benz*, a car that was probably not parked in any other yard in the GDR at that time. In this way, home movies in the GDR stimulated individualization under state socialism.

31. Sönke Friedreich, *Urlaub und Reisen während der DDR-Zeit: Zwischen staatlicher Begrenzung und individueller Selbstverwirklichung* (Dresden: Thelem, 2011), 26–29.

32. Home movie collection Schmidt*, "Carwitz 1971," black and white, 1971, 03:14 min. Home movie collection Müller*,"Reisen," color, undated, 28:21 min. Home movie collection Krüger, "Urlaub mit Schmidts und Krügers," color, 1974–1983, 16:06 min.

33. Home movie collection Diedrich*, "Gernrode 1981," color, 1981, 09:17 min. Home movie collection Stahlmann, "Thüringen," color, 1987–1988, 16:48 min. Home movie collection Mayer*, "Urlaub", color, undated, 04:57 min., "Der Seefilm," black and white, undated, 08:09 min. Home movie collection Krüger, "Urlaub mit Schmidts* und Krügers," color, 1974–1983, 16:06 min. Home movie collection Müller*, "Reisen," color, undated, 28:21 min. Home movie collection Schmidt*, "Rundreise 1977," black and white and color, 1977, 02:50 min., "Lindow 1979," color, 1979, 02:40 min.

However, my analysis of these films lacks information about the sources of production and reception, which are equally important factors in order to understand movies.[34] For this reason, I included two additional sources and methods, and it is this which makes my historical and anthropological approach distinctive. In my research, I understood home movies to be more than the images they show. On the one hand, these movies were still in use when I met the former home moviemakers, and I was interested to find out what meanings they have today, thirty years after reunification. So I interviewed the moviemakers, and we watched some movies from their collection together. On the other hand, home movies form part of a historical discourse on technology, family, and leisure, so I was curious to explore the relevance of private filmmaking under socialism. I did so by analyzing manuals and guides, as described in the following section.

"A paradigm of idealized behavior"? Analyzing Manuals and Guides

How-to manuals, books, and magazines had a significant influence on the popularization of home moviemaking. This type of literature generally addressed home moviemakers by expressing disapproval of their techniques, such as a lack of planning, scripting, or editing, and made a number of recommendations about how to film correctly, based on the model of feature films. In his analysis of home movies, anthropologist Richard Chalfen compares them to manuals: "This literature contains an interesting and quite complete paradigm of idealized behavior".[35] His observation could easily be transferred to how-to manuals in East Germany. The similarity is striking, as manuals from the GDR warn about similar mistakes and give tips on how to avoid

34. Hickethier, *Film- und Fernsehanalyse*, 6.

35. Chalfen, *Snapshot Versions*, 49.

them. However, these normative texts are also useful sources when it comes to analyzing statements about private filmmaking under changing cultural and political circumstances in socialist East Germany, for example the periods before, during, and after the cultural revolution from 1958 until the early 1960s, when individual leisure activities became a point of contestation for state authorities. I analyzed fourteen manuals[36] and two journals,[37] *Film für Alle* and *FOTOKINO-magazin*, which were published from the early 1950s until 1990. This allowed me to diachronically compare repeated statements about home moviemaking in manuals and journals in different periods of East German history. I clustered these statements and categorized them by period, adapting the periodization of GDR cultural politics presented in Gerd Dietrich's *Kulturgeschichte der DDR*.[38]

Shortly after the uprising of workers in June 1953 and following several concessions to the protesters, the ruling Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland*, or SED) permitted the publication of nonpolitical literature. One example was the *Schmalfilm-Lehrbuch* (*Narrow-Gauge Movie Handbook*).[39] It was mainly aimed at home moviemakers who owned a camera from before the Second World War, as such devices only became available to buy in the GDR in the late 1950s. This is why the guide shows family as male breadwinner and female homemaker, contra the socialist ideals of gender equality. It is men who are shown working and filming, while women did the childcare and were the object in front of the camera.[40] Aside from this conservative perspective, the manual's arguments are along similar lines to equivalent Western publications. Moviemakers were supposed to follow the proposed rules in order to

36. Analyzed Manuals: Heinrich Freytag, *Wir filmen mit 8 mm* (Halle/Saale: Fotokino-verlag, 1958). Richard Groschopp, *Über Filmgestaltung: Ein Regiehandbuch für Filmamateure* (Leipzig: VEB Fotokinoverlag, 1975). Richard Groschopp, *ABC des Schmalfilmens* (Halle/Saale: Fotokinoverlag, 1958). M. V. Hotschewar, *Das Schmalfilm-Lehrbuch*, Richard Groschopp (ed), (Halle/Saale: Wilhelm Knapp, 1952). Rolf Hempel, *Filmideen – fix und fertig* (Leipzig: VEB Fotokinoverlag, 1970). Günter Hölzel and Günther Sterz, *Wir wollen filmen!* (Halle: VEB Fotokinover-lag, 1963). Hanns Rolf Monse, *Filmen macht Spass* (Leipzig: VEB Fotokinoverlag, 1982). Jürgen Schweinitz, *Familien- und Urlaubsfilm* (Leipzig: VEB Fotokinoverlag, 1973).

37. Analyzed Journals: *Film für Alle. Zeitschrift für das Amateur-Filmschaffen* (1956–1962). *FOTOKINO-magazin* (1963–1991).

38. Gerd Dietrich, *Kulturgeschichte der DDR I: Kultur in der Übergangsgesellschaft 1945–1957* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018). Gerd Dietrich, *Kulturgeschichte der DDR II: Kultur in der Bildungsgesell-schaft 1957–1976* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018). Gerd Dietrich, *Kulturgeschichte der DDR III: Kultur in der Konsumgesellschaft 1977–1990* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018).

39. M. V. Hotschewar, *Das Schmalfilm-Lehrbuch*, Richard Groschopp (ed.) (Halle/Saale: Wilhelm Knapp, 1952). Until 1958, this manual had three reissues with a run of 35.000 copies. See, e.g., Dietrich, *Kultur in der Übergangsgesell-schaft 1945–1957*, 516–523. Cornelia Kühn, *Die Kunst gehört dem Volke? Volkskunst in der frühen DDR zwischen politischer Lenkung und ästhetischer Praxis* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2013), 19–20.

create cultural products: "The compact cine camera will be an instrument of culture".[41]

The earlier manuals did not concern themselves with private film productions outside the state's sphere of influence. This changed in 1958 when politicians demanded the cultural participation of workers in state-organized leisure activities so as to reinforce national awareness of and commitment to socialism.[42] Manuals still promoted aesthetic norms of professional filmmaking. Additionally, such literature promoted the production of narrow-gauge movies in organized and collectivized clubs and circles.[43] Amateurfilm became the legitimate term for workers participating in such cultural activities, while aimless snapshotting at home was associated with the term Hobby, which was considered not to be of public interest: "One should only speak of a hobby if it is carried out in a quiet closet".[44] In the late 1950s and early 1960s, making home movies in private was not forbidden, but it was frowned upon.

However, as noted above, 8 mm and Super 8 films stimulated individualization rather than preventing it. The majority of narrow-gauge camera owners did not participate in state-run film clubs, according to a survey of the *FOTOKINO-magazin* in 1964.[45] Thus, authors of manuals and publishing houses had to reconsider the interest of private filmmakers in order to avoid losing this readership, which meant a considerable change in their understanding of home movies. Accompanied by the rise in vacations, the increasing complexity of consumer culture, and the growing distribution of filming devices in the 1960s, home moviemaking became a legitimate leisure activity, subject to two conditions: moviemakers were supposed to follow the recommendations of the

40. Hotschewar, *Das Schmal-film-Lehrbuch*, 154–155.

41. Hotschewar, *Das Schmal-film-Lehrbuch*, 8.

42. Dietrich, *Kultur in der Bildungsgesellschaft 1957–1976*, 851.

43. *Film für Alle* (April, 1960), 99.

44. *Film für Alle* (November, 1961), 325. See also: *Film für Alle* (June, 1962), 168–169.

45. *FOTOKINO-magazin* (January, 1965), 29. According to the survey (around 1.000 replies), only 29 percent of the readers were participating in circle or working group as part of the organized amateurism in the GDR.

manuals, and home movies were supposed to contribute to the improvement of society by analyzing leisure activities under socialism. The manual *Filmideen fix und fertig* (*Ready-to-Go Film Ideas*) added: "How do families live in the GDR? [...] The family is the smallest cell of our state. A lot depends on the right family life".[46] Filming in private became legitimate only if it served the end of improving socialist society by giving positive examples of family life in the GDR. This concept of home moviemaking lacked any idea of plain, nonpolitical pleasure as a purpose of filming. However, the debate had little influence on the actual behavior of home moviemakers, who still enjoyed filming without any political end in mind. From the mid-1970s onward, manuals display a general acceptance of home moviemaking as a nonpolitical leisure activity (fig. 4). They still give rules for professional filmmaking, but for the sake of "enjoyment"[47] and "amusement"[48] rather than political reasons.

46. Rolf Hempel, *Filmideen – fix und fertig* (Leipzig: VEB Fotokinoverlag, 1970), 65.

47. Jürgen Schweinitz, *Familien- und Urlaubsfilm* (Leipzig: VEB Fotokinoverlag, 1973), 7–8.

48. Hanns Rolf Monse, *Filmen macht Spass* (Leipzig: VEB Fotokinoverlag, 1982), 128.

Figure 4. From the mids-1960s cover of the HTDI-Journal FOTOKINO-magazin published regularly images of everyday life.

My contextual analysis of manuals reveals, on the one hand, political attempts to regulate home moviemaking. On the other hand, a diachronic perspective shows that this top-down communication failed, because home moviemakers kept snapshotting private family events rather than elaborately filming socially relevant themes in amateur working collectives. Cultural politicians, editors, and authors had to take account of this individualization in order to maintain readers' interest in their publications. An analysis of how-to literature thus demonstrates flexible strategies toward private filmmaking under dictatorship.

"Another layer of meaning"? Analyzing Film Interviews

A movie is never self-contained and isolated. Its meaning depends on the context of perception; Nicholas Mirzoeff calls this interaction of image and audience a "visual event".[49] For this reason, I chose to meet the former home moviemakers and initiate cinematographic screenings at home: a projector was brought out, a screen pinned on the wall, and a film reel inserted (fig. 5). Then the light was turned off and suddenly we were sitting in the dark. As the projector began rolling and the images of family gatherings and vacations appeared on the screen, the interviewees' memories were stimulated and they gave commentaries on the silent images. The selection of the movies was "auto-driven," meaning that the interviewees were able to decide themselves which movies to show.[50] The meetings were therefore participatory, and possible hierarchies between researcher and interviewee were significantly reduced.[51] After a longer period of nonstop watching, conversation petered out and storytelling gave way to describing what we could see on the screen.

49. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 7–13.

50. Francesco Lapenta, "Some Theoretical and Methodological Views on Photo-Elicitation," in Eric Margolis and Luc Pauwels (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Visual Research Methods* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2011), 201–202.

51. Douglas Harper, "Talking about Pictures: A Case for Photo Elicitation," *Visual Studies* 17, no. 1 (2002): 23.

Despite these deficits, this approach does appear to be fruitful, as researchers and archivists need biographical information about the home moviemakers and the context of the production and reception. Among film scholars, however, the value of the method is still disputed. Cecilia Mörner has described the problem of applying film analysis to unscripted, unedited, and silent movies, and argued in favor of film interviews, since contextualizing production notes and other written sources are usually absent in the case of home movies.[52] Ryan Shand disagrees, arguing that film interviews cannot replace film analysis, but rather produce "another layer of meaning".[53]

52. Cecilia Mörner, "Dealing with Domestic Films: Methodological Strategies and Pitfalls in Studies of Home Movies from the Predigital Era," *The Moving Image* 11, no. 2 (2011): 22–45.

53. Ryan Shand, "Retracing the Local: Amateur Cine Culture and Oral Histories," in Julia Hallam and Les Roberts (eds), *Locating the Moving Image. New Approaches to Film and Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 210.

Figure 5. Doing film elicitation: A projector is being prepared for screening in the presence of the researcher.

So how can film interviews be helpful if they create a new framework instead of specifying the historical context? As there is no state archive in Germany collecting these movies, there is a lack of information on their creators and subjects. When researchers find "orphan films," they do not know the date of origin or the relations between the people on screen (for instance, a midwife can easily be confused with a child's mother if she is shown holding the baby, or a black and white movie can be mistaken

for being older than color films). Of course, reenacted memories must not be confused with the historical event, and memories of contemporary witnesses are never fixed. Finally, the social, cultural, political, and emotional status of the interviewees at the time of the screening has a huge impact on the commentaries.[54]

Despite these arguments, the following extract from a film interview exemplifies the advantage of the method for studying gendered practices in home moviemaking. As in Western consumer cultures, East German home movies are typically shot by men filming their families, and so display a male gaze on childhood and mothership. This same hierarchy was reproduced during the film interviews, as it were men who operated the projectors and so were in the privileged position to decide what to screen. However, women regularly attended these screenings and contributed commentaries to the interviews, which revealed differing patterns of response to the images.

When I met the Leschkes*, we watched a movie of their son's baptism. While screening, Herr Leschke* remarked on the technical problems during the recording: "Yeah, it was a cloudy day. See, all the umbrellas. The definition suffered immediately. You know, definition always was a problem. Especially with Super 8, because the images were so small".[55] Meanwhile, his wife, watching the exact same movie, recalled the emotional value of the images: "You [Herr Leschke*] were on special leave from the army and then you were gone again. Enrico was three months old at that time!"[56] Thus, the scenes of this family ritual show one of the rare occasions when the family was together. In the difficult period of military service, which caused his long absence, the camera helped Herr

54. Harald Welzer, "Das Interview als Artefakt. Zur Kritik der Zeitzeugenforschung," *BIOS. Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung und Oral History* 13, no. 1 (2000): 51–63.

55. Interview with Franz and Angela Leschke*, coal merchant and kindergarten teacher, recorded by the author, August 05, 2015.

56. Interview Leschke*, August 05, 2015.

Leschke* to adjust to his new role as a father. However, Frau Leschke* did not film at all during his absence, and so the scenes only show moments when he was present. East Germany claimed to have progressive gender politics, which was prominently represented in public visual discourse with images such as women working in male-dominated areas like engineering. This might have prompted Frau Leschke* to assume an equal role in filming family events. Why did she not pick up the camera and commit more of her son's development to film?

She gave an explanation for this during the film interview: "When we had children and they were little — I had no time to do such a hobby".[57] Like in Western societies, women in the GDR still remained responsible for childcare and housekeeping, and earned less at work than men.[58] Simply put, there was not enough time and money for women to do home moviemaking. This adds another layer of meaning, as the film interviews revealed two things: firstly, the movies perpetuated images of male-breadwinner and female-homemaker families in East Germany, contradicting the ideal of gender equality under socialism. This is attributable to social conditions in the GDR. At the same time, the film interviews showed a dissolution of gender hierarchies, as Frau Leschke* was also able to add her perspective on this movie, a female perspective that was originally not visible because she was only the object in front of the camera. Ultimately, watching these movies together also revealed distinct gender roles.

Conclusion

Home movies have been largely neglected as visual sources by historians. Firstly, because archives do not

57. Interview Leschke*, August 05, 2015.

58. Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 131–132.

collect them systematically; secondly and relatedly, because until recently historians had little interest in private movies, since they appear irrelevant to grand historical narratives of politics, economics, and the arts; thirdly, because of a lack of the requisite methodological tools. This article proposes an interdisciplinary approach that combines film analysis, analysis of written sources, and film interviews. I have argued that combining perspectives from history and film studies sheds light on these underexposed moving images by using mutually complementary methods.

Home movies reveal images of laughing relatives, playing children, and families on vacation, while the political context of a socialist dictatorship seems invisible. One might easily regard them as a visual retreat into the private sphere, as at first glance there seem to be no traces of state paternalism. However, my analysis has demonstrated that home moviemaking in the GDR was far more complex than that. The images reveal the moviemakers' agency. Manuals involve negotiations between political and aesthetical guidelines on the one hand and popular pastimes on the other. Commentaries by home moviemakers while rewatching the movies reveal alternatives to the stereotypical representations of gender roles.

Analyzing manuals as part of a cultural-political context reveals a long-term debate on home moviemaking that was not uniformly paternalistic but varied and developed across time. Manual authors, who were often professional filmmakers, criticized "snapshotting" and the lack of any preparation before shooting and screening. In this respect, East German manuals resembled those from Western countries.[59] But they differed in the intertwining

59. USA: Patricia R. Zimmermann, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Films* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995). GB: Heather Norris Nicholson, *Amateur Film: Meaning and Practice, 1927–1977* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012). NL: Susan Aasman, *Ritueel van huiselijk geluk: Een cultuurhistorische verkenning van de familiefilm* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2004).

of such norms with the transformation of concepts of leisure under socialism, such as the demand that filmmakers participate in state-organized clubs rather than filming in private. However, this did not change media practices. Home moviemaking remained a nonpolitical leisure activity, and manuals had to reflect this individualization in order to keep their audience interested. This was the result of a cultural-political transformation rather than a paternalistic strategy. The recommendations regarding what was legitimate to film privately could form part of a larger study on family history and media usage.

My analysis showed that the individualization revealed in the East German home movies differs little from that in Western ones. The images of individual mobility, Western brands, and family vacations instead represent globally circulating pictures that connected technology and consumption in the second half of the twentieth century. They followed bourgeois traditions of family photography and photo albums, focusing on celebrations, rituals, children, and vacations.[60] These recording devices thus enabled home moviemakers to express social distinctions and the attraction of Western consumer culture, while leaving out many specific features of the political context. And so, contrary to what we might expect, the images closely resemble those from Western societies, despite the fact that they originated under state socialism. In both East and West, home moviemakers could choose freely what they personally thought was worth filming.

Finally, film interviews shed light on the polyvalence of images, an often-challenging condition for historians. Screening, watching, and commenting on old home

60. Susanne Breuss, "Er-innerung und schöner Schein. Familiäre Fotokultur im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert", in *familienFOTOfamilie: Begleitbuch zur Jahresausstellung 2000 im Ethnographischen Museum Schloß Kittsee vom 16. April bis 5. November 2000* (Kitsee: Ethno-graphisches Museum, 2000), 27–63.

movies adds information to the traditional male-breadwinner and female-housekeeper images that were repeatedly produced. Individual memories reveal social struggles during the movies' production. The visual idealization of a popular family type contradicted socialist ideals of equality. On the other hand, commentaries during the film interviews challenged these role models, as women could now add their personal perspectives. This shows the value of such sources for the study of gender roles and media practices. For this reason, archivists should also consider adopting this methodological approach, and record information of this sort when receiving home movie footage from donors.

List of Figures

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