

## **Fabio Scacchioli**

Q1Q: As a first question I would like to ask you how you would describe the home movie to a person who is not familiar with the concept.

Q1A: Well, to a person who does not know what a home movie is; I believe it is difficult to find a person who does not have a clue of what a home movie is, because it is something that more or less everyone owns. Then I need to ask you a technical question: by home movie you refer to the footage recorded on reel or you include also video?

Q1Q: No, I take the reel into account.

Q1A: Well, if you refer to the support of the reel then there are people who are not very familiar with it. I would simply tell them that home movies are private family recordings belonging to the past; then obviously this is quite a trivial definition that can be useful for someone who has no idea about what a home movie is. For me personally, they are not only this. The home movie is not only a simple remembrance of a private family event that reflects a certain kind of society or culture. It is also this. But personally, I am interested more in other aspects. For me in general and I talk here about the image in general and not only the home movie, I am interested in that what the image hides from us, the invisible side of each image. I believe that each image, belonging to documentary, fiction, or the private sphere, shows us something but at the same time it conceals something from us. This invisible side is much more interesting for me personally. Translating it to the field of family film, we could build a conversation on the typical images of this footage, which are mainly scenes depicting family reunions happening under certain events or circumstances such as a baptism, a birthday party, a celebration or a trip. We are therefore presented with images of happiness. But also in this case this happiness is almost fictional. The characters starring in home movies are in the end interpreting a role. I do not want to say they are actors but for sure they play a part, which is given by the social context in which the film is being recorded. Therefore even those images that transmit us a feeling of carelessness and light-heartedness, that nostalgia for the best years that have passed, are very often illusory, in the sense that behind these happy faces lies often something else. I am interested in that something else which is there. So I would attempt to do this type of logical explanation to a person who does not know much about home movies: start with the trivial definition and then explain the 'underground' nature of the home movie.

Q1Q: Do you make any kind of distinction between home movies and found footage?

Q1A: I am making a distinction in the sense that home movies are found footage, but in the sphere of found footage there is also other material there. Found footage can be also a non-amateur film, a fiction film, that is found. I take this definition literally: found footage is recorded footage that has been found and can therefore be not only family film but also any other material from different sources. I have worked in various occasions with reels that were not family films but reels of old fiction films or documentaries. Found footage is therefore a much wider category.

Q1Q: What about the contextual information surrounding home movies and offering details on the owners of the home movies? Does this play a role in determining if a home movie is found footage or not?

Q1A: Yes, this can make a difference between the two definitions. I consider that for a large portion of home movies we know who they owners are. I imagine that a large proportion of donators are known, but I do not exclude of possibility of home movies with unidentified owners. You can find so many in small flea markets for example. For this reason it is not excluded for family films to have a

known donator/owner. But it can also be an abandoned object that is on sale in a flea market or in an attic. The same type of logic can be applied to fictional found footage. Some years ago it happened to me to find mixed material, both private and belonging to film sets, in a garbage bin in Spain. There you have the classic example of how you can find both classic material and home movie footage whose owners are unidentified. This led me to *Obect Oubliè*, a film that you have probably seen. The work started with 4 film reels in 35mm; 2 of them were part of a film which I was never able to identify, the other two are classic home movies, obviously belonging to a rich family, as this format was not a cheap hobby.

Q1Q: This is a very interesting aspect, to find in the same place two distinct type of footage and get inspired by it.

Q1A: Yes, this is my way of thinking and operating. I recognise different categories inside the moving image field, but very often these categories also have common traits. I like finding this common ground that enables you to contaminate materials of different origins. I am not exactly what you would call a purist.

Q2Q: As an artist, how do you perceive the reception of movies which reuse this type of footage? What role do you think the artists had in this evolution?

Q2A: I think this is quite an important role. I would not know to give your numbers, but I perceive an increasing interest from the public in such kind of productions. But I would not focus on the quantitative aspect of it. I think that the qualitative aspect is more important, the relationship that the public has built with this material. This is on the one hand thanks to the artists who have disseminated this material and rendered it accessible, on the other hand thanks to festivals of found footage or festivals dedicated to private material like the festivals in Bologna (*Home Movies Bologna* is an important reality in this sector). I therefore think that artists play an important role regarding the level of interaction of the public with this sort of private material. I think that today the public is much more sensitized compared to even few years ago.

Q3Q: For this kind of footage, which do you think are the best audio-visual or creative products that fit best a reuse of amateur footage?

Q3A: I think that any type of image is good to reuse; from the Hollywood film to the documentary film or the underground reel that is hard to find, up to the family film. I think that each image bears a hidden potential, one that is hidden and stands behind the more immediate meaning, and therefore I do not manage to make a clear distinction. The important thing is to realise this potential and bring it to light. How can you make it emerge? This is a trait that distinguishes found footage film. You take an image and you decontextualize it. If you take a scene from a Hollywood movie that has a specific meaning inside this movie, be it narrative, metaphoric and so on, and you decontextualize it, by inserting it in a new context, you uncover this hidden potential of the image. This is a potential that thanks to the de-contextualizing and re-contextualising process, comes to light. The same logic can be applied to the home movie. That which can look like a harmless family scene, put in a context that is able to enter into dialogue with other sources and images, can assume a completely different meaning. This is a visible aspect also of my work with the images from the *Acquila* earthquake, where happy family moments acquire another 'tonality', as they are introduced in a different kind of discourse. For me it is important to say that the image is not a monolith, with a univocal meaning and capable of being interpreted inly in one way. The image is something that can be moulded,

shaped, which can be something very positive, from an artistic point of view, but also very dangerous, as it can be easily manipulated, twisting and contorting its meaning.

Q3Q: Home movies are historically divided into two areas: the documentary field where their historical and social importance is underlined, and the experimental film, where the creative and artistic potential of this footage comes to light. How do you see parallel existence between these two forms of valorisation?

Q3A: I think that we return always to what I said before. These two modes that can appear distinct to one another, are paradoxical not so different: we can use the same scene to develop both a documentary and at the same time a piece of fiction. We return to the logic of the intrinsic potential of the image. All we have to do is to activate one or the other potential, because the image contains them both. In my opinion every image contains the social and historical power on the one hand and on the other a more creative power. It lies in the hands of the author, the artist or the filmmaker to decide what to do with it. The more variety there is, the better. I do not like to think about a single use, so I welcome the diversity of productions. On the contrary, I think that the private footage is interesting to contextualise inside a case of fiction, which might definitely bother historians or purists. I find it instead very interesting.

Q3Q: Yes, I have noted this at institutional level. The Archive in Palermo is much more reluctant regarding the experimental and creative possibilities of home movie footage, while Home Movie Bologna is more open to it. In a sense I am preoccupied by this closure.

Q3A: Yes, nevertheless lately there is an increasing openness towards other fields such as that of performance, live activities that run on the spot, in which the image becomes a sort of musical composition. I think this is another very interesting aspect. The risk lies in the possibility to manipulate the meaning of the images, but again it lies in the hands of the audience and its sensibility to understand the context in which the image has been inserted. So if the image was inserted in a performance, that has nothing to do with a historical and social reconstruction, you need to make an appeal to the awareness of who is watching. For this reason it is important to be able to sensitise each time more the public towards this type of productions.

Q4Q: Could you tell me when you started reusing amateur footage and why?

Q4A: if we need to refer to home movies, I have reused more found footage in general, since I started producing my artistic work. Lets say there is not exactly a why. Just like a painter uses the brushes and colours to create paintings, it was something that came to me naturally to reuse already existing images. I would say we can talk almost about an instinct. Regarding home movies, the first occasion arose during my work on Acquila and the earthquake. I got in touch with Home Movies, who at that time issued a sort of contest for filmmakers. I sent my project that included the retrieval of private material on the topic, they liked it and decided to fund my project. I started searching for material, got to know people in Acquila, then part of my family lives in Acquila, so lets say I had an additional, more affective reason to do this project. I got close to home movies, also because of my own personal motivation, as the earthquake regarded my family and me. This strong affective component led me to find private footage, memories that risked to get lost. From there developed my work. I can say that my personal involvement in the earthquake of 2009 influenced a lot my decision to approach private material.

Q4Q: So this was the point that led you to use this footage.

Q4A: Yes, it was a mix of casualty and artistic passion, because I had already used found footage; then unfortunately there was this dramatic event and many people felt the need to recover this memory, to restore it. Of course each person did it in his own personal way. For example inside my work you can see a young man who walks through the ruins of the earthquake aftermath, on the search for traces and memories. This young man is a person who lost his family and the first instinctual thing that he did is to go out there and try to recover any sort of memory such as photos or objects, who did not belong only to him but also to other people. These objects were his only connection to the past.

Q5Q: Which do you think are the difficult and the easy aspects for an artist working with found footage or family film?

Q5A: The difficult part, well I would not call it difficult part, as it is also something nice and exciting, would be the fact of using your time to go and look for material. Found footage is a found footage so there needs to be someone who finds it. The difficulty can lie sometimes in the research. The positive aspect is that you are working with material that is a very rich source of creativity. I find it personally material that is very rich in creative cues. It is something that attracts and fascinates me a lot.

Q5Q: What do you think instead about the rights issues for the reuse of this material: agreements such as creative commons?

Q5A: I am obviously not a legal expert, but in my personal opinion this material should be freely accessible for anyone. I am radical enough about this. I am against the ownership rights. All my work is online and available for everyone, also regarding the reuse. I am totally for the public domain and against the copyright. I would like to be free to use any kind of big production material for my artistic, non-commercial work.

Q5Q: I completely agree on this. Unfortunately there are still many bureaucratic issues involved.

Q5A: Yes. Even if I am not a legal expert, but from a naïve position, instinctually, I would say that for me the images, like culture in general should be available for all, without difference.

Q5Q: As you worked both with institutional archives and also more independently, searching for material in different places, what do you think about these two possibilities for retrieving material?

Q5A: The only collaboration I had with an institutional archive was with Home Movie Bologna. Then again I find the personal research more fascinating. Of course I see the institutional archive as a very important reality. But also in this case, what I am interested in is the 'incomplete' nature of the archive. The logic behind the establishment of the institution of the archive is 'knowledge'. Conceptually speaking the institutional archive has a totalising aim. Me instead, I am interested in the gaps, in the impossibility of the archive to be complete, to store all material. I think this is an aspect that interests me, the fragility of the archive, and not its structure, its heaviness. Maybe this is why I am more interested in an archive in the material that is less visible, almost invisible, the things that are less searched for and seen. Then another thing I wanted to say about the previous question on my creative process. I do not like to have a very detailed structure of my work, such as a film script. For me it is important that my work becomes above all an experience. You cannot programme the experience completely. You can channel it, but then if you want to live an experience you also need to be open towards the unpredictable and error. This is fundamentally for me. It can often happen to start with an idea, and at the end of the process the idea is not the initial one anymore, it has changed. It is part of a process that thanks to the initial idea has been completed. I have quite a

dynamic vision of the audio-visual as an experience and not as a product, an artistic project. I like the open and not completed things and generally the experience and not the product. I think this is one of the fundamental issues for me.

Q5Q: Unfortunately from this point of view the format of the festival is mainly that of a final product, an output that is being presented at the end of a research period.

Q5A: Yes, I realise it is like this. Also in my case, I need to close my projects; I need to draw the conclusions of my work, of the experiences I lived. So in the end you always reach a closing time. But for me it is important that during this process I do not close myself off from anything. Sometimes a very rigid structure can close you many streets and you risk to not be aware of it. You do not have initially the courage to look beyond your initial point of view.

Q6Q: Could you describe me a little more in detail the creative process where you reuse found footage? How are the ideas born, how you search for material, how you move around creatively?

Q6A: Referring to found footage or family film?

Q6Q: I would say to both

Q6A: I can say that there is maybe a difference between the two uses. For home movies there needs to be a sort of subjective or personal involvement to do it, as it happened with the earthquake. Then also for other works I reused family films, it was always footage connected to my own environment. I don't know, for home movies there needs to be a sort of affective condition that enables me to work with it. For found footage, the approach can be also a little bit cooler, more distanced. I can depart from a more abstract idea and decide then what kind of footage I need. With home movies it happened that I proceeded also in a very instinctive way, without having a clear idea from the start, but only knowing exactly what kind of feeling I wanted to transmit through my work.

Q6Q: Like in the case of the garbage bin reels that you found, where instinct drove you to develop your work...

Q6A: yes.

Q7Q: Do you have specific archives that you have felt closer to yourself?

Q7A: You talk about home movies?

Q7Q: Both home movies and found footage.

Q7A: I do not have a big experience with physical archives. I collaborated with Home Movies, and I was satisfied. For the rest I do not have a big experience with other archives. I possess more experience with online archives; for example Archive.org or simply with the online research of footage. Maybe this is the thing that I do most. Lets say I like to look for material in the real, physical world, but very often it happens that I search for it online. Also online there are some interesting realities. Besides Archive.org, many institutions decided to put their collections online and they often give you the permission to reuse it. For example the British Film Institute has put online more than a hundred films, ranging from documentaries to private films, educational, scientific material and so on. It is very interesting material that I happened to use in my work.

Q7Q: but Youtube for example, do you use it as a resource?

Q7A: Yes, lets say that when I find interesting material I seldom use it as it is, as I find it. I often edit it. Maybe this is because online content is most of the times lower quality material. Re-recording this footage often confers to the image a specific grain, that interests me a lot.

Q8Q: Regarding home movies, did it happen to find ambiguous, non-conventional scenes?

Q8A: In my opinion the non-conventional character is to be searched for under these layers, the roles that each of us needs to play inside society and also as part of the home movie. This is mostly a role belonging also to the artist, to search for things that are less self-assuring and more original, that go beyond the immediacy of the image, which in relation to the home movie is rather reassuring. Then again it is not always like this. It happened to me to stumble upon scenes of protest, violence; this is completely another field. Also inside the home movie sector there is a certain variety.

Q8Q: Ok, so you refer to this act of thinking out of the box.

Q8A: It is the role of the artist or the author to go beyond the immediacy of the image, to think out of the box. The originality lies in the capacity of who is watching to observe the hidden aspects of an image, that very often could look like a trivial image.

Q8Q: I wanted to read a statement and know from you what you think about it: 'family films are doodles of the soul, invisible writing, that contain such magmatic, germinal and radical material, that they contribute to the renewal of the moving image'.

Q8A: I very much agree to this statement. During the past years, through the introduction of this type of footage, an aura of diversity was created, in reference to the standard production. The practice with home movies generated also different kind of creative processes, with other kind of footage that renewed the audio-visual language. This was partly due to this sort of archive. Until some tens of years back in time, film language was very clearly cut, between documentary cinema, which handles reality and facts and fiction cinema, which develops narratives and stories. Nowadays the sector is much more variegated, much more complex. Above all it is much more contaminated. For sure inside this environment, amateur film plays an important role. Because it has a radically different approach compared to industrial cinema. I would say it is a completely different thing. In amateur film there is not only the technique, I mean the perfect but often 'void' mastery of the technical medium that belongs to big productions, but also the fact that amateur film is a type of cinema that loves itself, it loves doing cinema. Therefore it is born out of a need, an urgency. This is for me the fundamental aspect of every artistic expression. If it is not born from a deep urgency, then it has no reason to exist. This is why that in my opinion a big part of big cinema productions have no reason to exist, artistically speaking. It is not art but industry.

Q9Q: What is your approach to images that have been produced by someone else, that you do not produce yourself? Do you consider this aspect?

Q9A: This is a question that I pose myself quite often. There is a certain responsibility in all this. When you confront yourself with footage done by a filmmaker you are aware that this material contains a certain level of affectivity. This is an emotion that belongs to someone else, that in reusing it, transfers some responsibility also on to you who are reusing this material. Sometimes it becomes an ethical issue. I would feel very bad if a filmmaker of an amateur film that I have reused was offended by the reuse I have done in my work. This is something I often ask myself. Through amateur film you have the opportunity to get in touch with the emotions, ideas and passions, the instincts and spiritual modes of someone else; whom you don't know, a sort of a ghost you are able to see only in the images of the reel. This is both fascinating and also something to reflect upon for who needs to create something.

Q9Q: As the 4 works where you reuse home movies have a common thread: that of memory, I wanted to ask you if this choice was led also by the nature of the material you worked with? If so, do you think that operating outside of this memory-sphere the home movies/found footage would lose some of its evocative power?

Q9A: I believe not. I do not know exactly which are the 4 films you refer to. For sure one of it is that of the earthquake.

Q9Q: The earthquake, The nightlife of the puddle, Look at fire! Oh boy!, and Objects Oublies.

Q9A: Yes, these are the films that include more of home movies. But I do not know if you have seen also other works that include found footage that is not home movie. For me the connection between the image and memory goes beyond the fact that this material is or not a home movie. It is always present, even if it comes in different shapes, tonalities and modalities. It is obvious that getting in touch with home movies brings to light in first place this aspect of memory, which is obvious. Therefore it is obvious that you confront yourself with this characteristic if you want it or not. Therefore, when I use home movies I have to deal with the aspect of memory. Memory is not only the nostalgic gaze towards the past, but it involves all time dimensions, both the past and the future. Memory is a complex process and not only a gaze into the past that can be more or less evocative, nostalgia or poetic. It is something much more complex and I love to investigate this complexity that involves the past, present and future. I like this complexity aspect of memory, its elusive and fluid nature. We are able to grasp on side of it but at the same time we miss other thousand aspects. Then memory is never the same; it changes constantly. The same home movie seen in a moment rather than another can change drastically; as it can change when seen by a person rather than by another. I am interested in this variety regarding both family film and found footage

Q9Q: What do you think the future of the home movie in the creative field looks like?

Q9A: I would not know how to answer his question. I only hope it is a future based on more variety, regarding the type of reuse. Because I think the risk lies also here: once this material is completely cleared, once it becomes almost an addiction, the risk is that of falling in the extreme of the trivial, the superficial and the total flattening both of the modes of access and creation. I see this risk. I hope for the contrary, that new and different expressive languages are able to emerge from the types of reuse made. This is always the risk with things that are not part of a given language system: that of being swallowed by the system through pre-existing modes, forcing it, trivialising it and rendering it in a certain way more reassuring. We need to be careful that this does not happen. If we do this we will cancel all the poetic potential of this material.

Q10Q: As a last question I would like to do an experiment with a video edited by myself from various home movies. I would like you to watch it and tell me what you think about it.

Q10A: Ok, I have seen it. The thing that hit me was the association between scenes, on the one hand the flashes showing different people (like ghosts in my opinion) and on the other hand the images of the temple, whose columns in the backlight raise against the sky. I have been struck that you have inserted also these images of landscape in between those with people. So I am led to make an instinctive association between the lives of these people and the ruins. Maybe it is a nostalgic perspective, not a very original one, but this is what struck me.