Morphing History into Histories

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When I was driving up here with my husband and son they asked me why are you cramming in the car? I had all these books and papers and pens. And I said because this is a really hard audience to talk to because (a) I don't have to do a sales job that we don't have to save amateur film and (b) about half of you have heard what I have to say so I had to think of something new.

So before I start I would like to thank Karan Sheldon and David Weiss for inviting me but most of all for running Northeast Historic Film. Reel Families and States of Emergency, my book that came out last year, would not be possible without this archive. They are really the true miners. And as I found out when I was in Cartagena, Colombia, this archive is seen by many archives in the developing world as a model for archives in countries where there is no film industry. I was amazed to hear people from Peru and places like this talk so glowingly about this archive. You'd think that this was the Library of Congress, to tell you the truth. I'd also like to really thank my buddy, Dwight Swanson, for talking me through a lot of the issues that come up. He's compiled a sample of films that we're going to show intermittently during this talk that will allow us to mull over the AMIA Selection Criteria on Amateur Film. So we'll be shuttling between talking watching, watching talking.

Let me just, before I start, tell you what I'm going to do here. What I'd like to do is not give you my take on amateurism, because you can always read what I wrote about it. But I'd rather, in the spirit of Erik [Barnouw], blast out some grids that we can use to think about the historiographic issues of selecting and saving and recovering amateur film. Please be relieved, I will not be using Powerpoint. I have a political issue about Powerpoint after reading that New Yorker article about it.

My idea is to raise questions rather than provide answers and to make things messy. I think we can't think through anything if it's too neat and clean. To make things messy and to also be in dialogue with other ideas circulating. A lot of what I'm going to say was inspired by the Orphans of the

Storm symposium that Dan Streible put together, where a lot of issues started boiling up and percolating and it got me thinking.

I always start my amateur talks with one kind of chant, which I'm going to have you all do. Some of you who were at Orphans know what the chant is. People are always asking me, Why amateur film? My answer is usually, Why not? So I made up this chant. It was printed in a paper in LA and now I'm getting reporters asking me about this. But it's not a very deep chant. We're all going to say it; you have to repeat after me. Ready? This is corny but just go with it. " Hollywood films are the home movies of global capital." OK, why don't we do it one more time with vigor. Hollywood films are the home movies of global capital. OK, you got that down? So anytime anybody asks you why are we saving amateur film, just say that. You don't have to say I made it up because I don't believe in authorship, I think that's ridiculous.

I have another adage and this one maybe isn't so funny but I think it's really quite appropriate and that is sort of an axiom I have that keeps me really centered as we look at this material. That is, "All amateur films are acts of mourning, loss and death." All amateur films are acts of mourning, loss and death. Therefore, as a result, they require that we both bury them with dignity, recover them and rehabilitate them, and honor them and memorialize them to activate them into the future. So I'll just say that one more time, All amateur films are acts of mourning, loss and death.

I say this because when we look at amateur films or when my mother says, Oh, you do amateur films, and she sends me endless articles about happy families taking happy images, and people say all amateur films are really happy, I think it's important to know that the people we look at in the images and the people who made them have passed on. And that this is an imprint, as it were, like rubbing a piece of tracing paper over a leaf.

So the title of my talk is Morphing Histories into Histories. What I really want to talk about is historiography. I want to loosen us up about how we think about history. So I say to my students, put on your seat belts, I talk really fast. And some of this may seem like total B.S., but that's OK. And some of it a year from now I may decide with I don't agree with any more. These are fresh ideas for me.

It's part of the introduction of a new book I'm editing with Karen Ishizuka called Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories. I'm trying to throw them out there to get us thinking in different ways. What I'm going to do, and I've never done anything like this before because I'm so anal and Germanic. I'm used to giving a real deductive argument. But I'm kind of sick of deductive arguments, I've been doing that for 20 years.

So what I'm going to do is give you seven different grids. I was inspired to do these seven different grids by the AMIA Small Gauge Selection Criteria because they gave us a grid, four things. It might be a good reminder to know what they are. This Appraisal and Selection Committee was composed of Sam Kula, Karan Sheldon, Steve Anker, Pat Loughney, Melinda Stone, and Anne Morra.

These are the four criteria and I'm going to give you some more criteria. My students love lists: they'll say, What was number three? These are grids, you can think of this as a kind of crazy artist's website.

1. Films representing the diversity of American life-scenes of daily life, and celebrations, holidays, rituals. Worklife and labor should be represented, as well as political action and social change.
2. Films made by members of amateur cine clubs.
3. Art, avant-garde, experimental works-and those that use small gauge technology to advantage.
4. Nationally significant persons/places/things.

I think these are really good criteria but what I'm going to do is both mess it up and I'm going to provide some ideas for how to theorize even more. Dwight, let's just show a clip here before we move on. All the clips I'll be showing are from Northeast Historic Film. This is from the Janice Smith Collection, the Helen V. Bird home movies. I'm going to quote you Dwight, you're in the booth so you can't say, Don't do it.

Dwight picked these films, I didn't, because we were talking on the phone about what are the selection criteria and how do we think about it. And he got me thinking about messiness. He said you can find obviously important films but what do you do about the ones that go further astray? He says he likes this collection of Helen V. Bird because he watched the whole thing. He watched the family grow up and he found this very moving. This collection was donated by one of the daughters and was named for her mother. But Dwight raises a query. The mother was a shutterbug, except mom's in a lot of the images. This is before auto-DV cameras. I was just watching Dateline and they had Ellen MacArthur with her DV cameras on her boat and I was thinking, we've come a long way. This is just a question, here's a donor who says Yes my mother made these. Yet you see mom in all the images. How did she do it? It also raises this problematic of authorship. Authorship is not like it is in Hollywood films. Dwight, let's let this roll but when we get to the second section, the Coleman Family, stop it.

As you're watching this, I know this is terrible to do with people who run film archives, I'm going to talk over the film. Because I don't want you to think of this as the Shroud of Turin. We're going to use it the way artists do.

Why do I say Morphing History into Histories? I want to give you some ideas here about historiography. When we deal with amateur film, what are we doing, all of us? We're moving from the singular that film is Hollywood, film is national cinema, to the plural. Film is amateur, documentary, avant-garde, porn, a whole range of cinematic practices. And this idea of pluralizing, going from a one to a many, is very big in historiographic circles right now but I think has not entered film history and film archives enough, despite the efforts of many of us.

Secondly, we're going to move from the official to the unofficial. The official always being that which has blackouts and lies. Think news, particularly the news coming out of the G-8 Summit, where there's been very little imagery of Giulianno Giuliani, the young man who was killed by the Italian police, yet if you go on the Indie Media site you can see streamed images of this, photographs, etcetera, all done by the way on amateur DV. So the official is blackouts and lies. To the unofficial. And the unofficial as we know from historians always problematizes the official. It tells a different story.

Thirdly, we're going to move from the center, which the center of cinema is always Hollywood and some national cinemas, to the margins. A move that's been made by many people over the last 20 years.

Fourth, we're going to move from doing a macro history-the History of the National of American Film-and almost every university film department teaches a course called American Film. And if you ever have anyone on your faculty who's Canadian they will tell you American film is not Hollywood. It's Canada, the US, Mexico, and Latin America. And so in fact at my school, cause I have a Canadian colleague, Vincent Grenier, that's how we teach American film. We're going to move from micro to micro history. I was explaining this at the Wolfson Media Center in Florida and a little retired lady said Can you give me a sense of what this macro micro stuff is? My mother was in the audience and I could tell my mother's thinking you're getting too abstract. So I said, Yeah, think Budweiser versus a microbrewer and you get the idea of what we're doing. Microhistories. And the idea about microhistories, this is very big in historiographic circles for about 20 years, one of the historians who moved to microhistory is Natalie Zemon Davis, who wrote a book, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, one of the first books that was turned into a movie based on history.

But the idea of microhistories, again, is that they're plural and I want to give you an example of this. There's a book by Salman Rushdie, which I read to my son. In *Harun and the Sea of Stories* the major character, his father is a storyteller. And the kid asks his father, How do you know what story to tell? And I think this is a good analog. The father says, Well it's very easy. All around us is this water and it's filled with beautiful colors. It's the sea of

stories. There are many, many stories of all different colors floating around and all you do is you get in your boat and you take your bucket and you dip it in. And many stories come out but you never get one story. And if you know the work of Salman Rushdie he's often identified as a post-colonialist postmodernist writer which is a lot of mumbo jumbo, but really what he's interested in is all those stories that are not told, but never telling one story.

So what is amateur film? It's a sea of stories, thinking of Salman Rushdie.

We're also, number 5, moving away from an idea of a unified history, which in film studies as Eric and Dan and Tricia, can tell you, were always presented as this very unified march of technological innovation. First we had primitive film, then we had the coming of sound, then we had the studio system, the breakup of the studio system, the rise of the independents, the rise of the agent, now we're in an era called post Hollywood and it goes on and on. And it's very unified. Although there are places where it isn't. And what many people in film history are trying to do now is trying to argue against this kind of unified history, which in the film world is often Hollywood or national cinemas, to an idea of fragmentation and incompleteness. And this is really tough. But people who work in archives here know, that's your whole life. Everything's a fragment, everything's incomplete. In some ways I feel stupid even talking about this because if you work in an archive or you're an artist, which is most of the people out there, you probably think academics like us, what drug are we on? You deal in the world of fragments and incompleteness all the time. But theoretically I think it's very important to hold onto this idea of fragmentation and incompleteness because there are great totalitarian dangers in completeness and unity.

Next, we're going to move from causal and linear history, that this caused this, the coming of sound meant the end of art cinema in Europe, it meant the end of competition if there was any in the film industry, it consolidated the studios blablabla, to a multilinear type of history. Just think Salman Rushdie's *A Sea of Stories*. Many stories layered on top of one another. I look here to the work of many of my colleagues in the audience where we're not just looking at amateur, we're also looking at sleaze on top of amateur, we're looking at newsreels being a subset, all of these things layered together. And we're also moving from continuity, things going in a line, to contiguity, which means more spatial. Things next to each other. The writing of a contiguous history is, I think, a great project for all of us to encounter because it asks us to think really differently about connections across and above and below, different kinds of vectors. I was explaining this a couple of weeks ago as thinking of the difference between a flat photograph and a 3D computer animation. That's where we want to go.

And lastly I think it's important to remember all of us involved in amateur film are involved in a civil war. There's absolutely no question in my mind and I think now with the election here of George W. Bush and his less than enthusiastic embrace of arts and culture, we are in an even deeper civil war. And what is this civil war about? We are fighting erasure, we're fighting forgetting and we're fighting deletion. And I think we all are aware of this, I'm not going to belabor it.

These selection criteria that AMIA has I think fit neatly into these larger historiographic issues. But what that they present us with is a much larger and more complicated issue of historiography. What is historiography:? A big word with a simple idea. Not just the facts and the data, but how we think about those facts and data. It's about the thinking of history. And if you translate it from the Latin and Greek it means the writing of history. How do we think about that? So let me give you another four grids.

Number 1, what we have to do is think about history. The great historian and historiographer Hayden White says, The biggest problem confronting historians and archivists is how we think about history, not how we do it. His argument is we all know how to do it because we go to the archives, we live in the archives, we're all factoid fetishists. But how do we think about it?

Secondly, that any criteria we use are a sorting process and a selection process. And this is the job historians deal with all the time. Constantly sorting, justifying and moving around. And that we have to just accept we're always going to be sorting. Because we live in my son's bedroom. I have an 8-year-old. If you have a kid you know what I'm talking about. There are Pokeman cards on the floor, there are broken pieces of superheroes, there are things on the walls he's cut out of the New York Times that are curled and crumpling. There's writing on the wall, clothes on the floor, you walk in--it's a landmine. There's junk everywhere. That's where we live when we're dealing with amateur film. And what we have to be careful of is not being too maternal about this and cleaning it up. Do you follow me? Because once we start organizing the Pokeman cards and organizing the superhero pieces and splicing all this junk together, what have we done? We have imposed something on the material that perhaps doesn't bear the weight of the material. Like every time I clean up my son's room, my son Sean says, Mom now I can't find anything. I'm using this a warning.

Fourth, we have to remember that the archive is not about the past, it's about the future. The archive's not about the past, it's about the future. I knew there were going to be academics here so I made sure I had academic theoretical quotes. So everyone else can sleep. Jacques Derrida in a fabulous book published in 1996 called Archive Fever wrote, The archivist (you're probably amazed he writes about archivists because he's the kind of

deconstruction), he writes, The archivist produces more archive and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future.

So in other words, the way to mobilize history is not to always think in the past. This is what people like Slobodan Milosovic in Serbia do, right? You mobilize the past to create nationalist fantasies, which then go and kill people and annihilate memory and we all know this because of what he showed on television. He showed a lot of archive footage during the war. Instead we want to think about the future. So what we pick for archives is always embedded in the needs of the present and the needs of the future. Now what does this mean? This means if you're an archivist or a historian you may need Zoloft or Prozac because you're going to be dealing with gaps, fissures, silences, vacancies, elisions and fragments. Now, if you're a Foucauldian historian, like me, and others in here, this is Nirvana. You want to play around with gaps and fissures and absences.

Now we're going to another grid, let's get some images up there, Dwight. This is the Coleman Family Collection, Dan Coleman's home movies. Dwight picked this and I love the reason he picked this. He finds a pattern in amateur films of seeing lots of images from Christmas. And he says it's the most common scene he sees in home movies. He likes this section, I should tell you, Dwight, you're a riot. He says it's interesting because there's less gift opening and there's a lot more drinking. This is why he picked the Coleman family.

I'm going to talk about my second grid while we watch this. My second grid is this idea of memory. What is memory? Now psychoanalytically in trauma theory there's been a lot of work on this a question of memory. It's not just remembering your shopping list. But it is actually how we deal with that which is lost. That which is gone. So memory is always a recovery process, always a retrieval. And what memory means is that we are speaking through trauma. The trauma of loss, of death and forgetting. So let me give you a grid for memory and this one only has three.

One, is another move official to unofficial.

The second move is a move from what is private, the Coleman's home films and their drinking, to what is public. One thing I want to dispense with here is that old patriarchal ideology that on the one hand there's the private and on the other hand there's the public. Or on the one hand there's the personal and the other hand there's the public. I find this extremely problematic and it's rife in film history. There's the private the public the personal the political. Not only am I an old Marxist, I'm an old feminist from the 70s and we don't accept this. We have this old phrase you've all heard, the personal is political. And what I've tried to do is update that for the 21st

century so I don't sound like an old hippy. And what I would say is that anything that's private in memory has the possibility in it to become public and history and collective memory. Everything.

So I'm probably a rebel in this crowd. I don't believe in privacy issues because I also don't believe in authorship and I don't believe in copyright. I know, you can nail me to the cross later. I'm just throwing this out. Actually the major goal we have in a democracy is to take that which is private and make it public. Because those who decide what gets made public are generally those who are officials in power, i.e., Slobodan Milosovic, George W. Bush, the New York Times on the G-8 Summit.

This is critical because if we have a border between what is private and what is public, what we have is a kind of nationalist border that can be dangerous because certain people can decide then what is history. Now I want to just give a quote from one of my favorite French historians of Russian extraction, Tzvetan Todorov, who wrote a really important essay about two years ago called *The Uses and Abuses of Memory*. Todorov writes, Totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century have revealed the existence of a danger never before imagined: the blotting out of memory. Every act of remembering, however small, could be useful in resisting it.

And I think this is a powerful comment on the dangers of private-public bordering. Again, I think Todorov is calling for a messing up of those borders, a blurring. He argues that there must be a distinction made between the recovery of a past and its subsequent use. I think he was really in a former life an archivist because every archivist, every museum I talk to, they ask me the same two questions: we're dealing with this recovery process of these fragments and this incompleteness. We need to get it out. How do we make it accessible? Places like Northeast Historic Film, the Wolfson, many places have been so imaginative in making contiguities between this footage and contemporary life. Now, where does this put us?

This is the third point about memory. How do we reimagine, then, film history and visual culture history, given these questions of memory and historiography? What I would argue, and don't ask me how we're going to do this, is that we need a new historiography of film if we're going to move to these areas, which some people call marginal but I would just call repressed, then we can't use the old historiographic models. They don't work.

You can see I went to the University of Wisconsin where many film historians come from and we were trained in graduate school: work from the artifacts out. In grad school we used to call this QBT. Do you know what that is? Quality Butt Time. It means the only way you know what you think about

anything is sitting in the archive looking at all the papers and watching, watching, watching. You work out from the artifact. And I think this is sobering. Because we never want to take theory and put it on the artifacts. If we do, again, who are we? George W. Bush. Slobodan Milosovic. We don't want to do that. We want to work out from the messiness.

If we work out from the messiness that means we can't be lazy. We can't simply import or splice or digitally composite historiographic models from other parts of film history, or national cinemas, or even other genres. Yet, and this is the trickiness, we can't forget about them completely. Because they are contiguitous to the work we're looking at. So what are some of those historiographic models? I'm going to give a list. You don't need to write this down, it's probably not that interesting.

1. Technological determinism. The march of technology is changing images. We all know about this. We all know now, if you teach in a film school, we're in the digital revolution. Well, for someone like me the digital revolution looks a lot like early primitive cinema of 100 years ago. Just different manufacturers.
2. The development of paradigmatic visual codes. Classical Hollywood cinema. What is it? How does it work? Bla bla bla.
3. Genres. What are the genres? We have documentary, experimental, bla bla bla, on and on. The Library of Congress and archivists need these genres, of course, to collect commercial cinemas. Very difficult to apply to amateur films and other marginal areas.
4. Auteurs and moguls. I like auteurs as any other film scholar. And I love moguls. I always pick a mogul to study every 6 months. Currently I'm into the digital guys out in Silicon Valley. I love these moguls. But we don't have moguls in amateur film and marginal cinema. We have to be careful about looking for auteurs and moguls. And it's something that concerns me a little bit about the US National Film Registry. The amateur films on it are very auteur based. We've got the Zapruder film of the Kennedy assassination, we've got the David Tatsuno footage of Topaz, and now we have Multiple Sidosis by Sid Leverentz. Now these are films that bespeak of larger social and historical movements. Yet it's interesting to me the Federal Government, they need these auteurs. And Karen Ishizuka who helped get the Topaz footage on said she actually first proposed the whole collection films from the internments and was advised no, you need an individual attached. I want to also point out, because Bill O'Farrell back there just pointed out to me, there's internment amateur footage in Canada. So you think about David Tatsuno, but the internment actually crosses borders. Another example of how we need to mess things up.
5. Another way history is done in film is industry configurations. Studios, nation-states, economies. These are easy ways of organizing material but we

don't really have that in amateurism. We have lots of companies manufacturing film and now video and digital, but this can also be very dangerous because in the world of the amateur we've had hackers forever. We all know before 1923 that there were lots of different formats. Now I would revise my book and call it the hacker era. Before there is economic consolidation you're always going to have hackers. Now my brothers, who's an I.T. economist for BP/Amoco hires hackers to make his firewalls. It's important to realize when we have competition and when we don't.

6. Another thing that is problematic is in conventional film history we often divide things into production, distribution, exhibition. As Eric Schaefer's wonderful book shows, and as Dan Streible's book on Emil DeAntonio shows, there are many other kinds of cinemas where production, distribution, exhibition vectors don't work. They just collapse. They collapse, they get reorganized.
7. And lastly is this idea of textual operations. Those of us in film, much of this comes from aesthetic theory. Everybody wants to analyze visual systems, where we look for coherency and unity. This makes teaching easy, right? What are the three points about Godard? A) jump cuts; B) independent; C) black and white in the streets. You want your list for the students so they kind of know what they're looking at. But this quest for coherency and unity is a dangerous textual operation.

Dwight, let's just go to the next film. What he's going to show is home video. He put this home video in because he says archivists don't want to collect home video. I heard someone in Canada say home video is the worst nightmare she could ever think of, because it's so endless. Dwight says despite the cataloging headaches, he thinks it's important to start thinking about it. I would argue here that what home video has is no coherency and no unity visually.

This is Pennsylvania, plus the Dustins, plus the Taylors. What do we do with home video? The way this is shot defies anything we know about in film. This is why I talk about visuality instead of aesthetic codes. Visualities are very messy. It's the word Karen Ishizuka and I have been tossing around. Believe me, this drives our editor crazy. Visuality, what is this? Tell me more about it.

We're going to move to grid number three: Concerns of historiography. Some of you might want to sleep through this part, cause it's kind of theoretical. Some of you might find it interesting. It's your choice, I won't be offended.

What do historians do? In the world of film as Eric and Dan and Tricia and I and others can tell you, we're always feeling like somehow there's "real" historians and they deal with the presidency and they deal with important

stuff. Government documents, Hollywood, things like this. And this is Eric and Dan and I burning all those histories, just so you know. We call those real histories. And then there's the kind of histories we do, I don't even know what they are. Actually I want to give you some issues here about historiography. The way people who do "real" history, Hayden White, these kind of people, Tony Bennett, Frank Ankersmit in Europe, and even Jacques Derrida, think about what is history.

I'm going to give you four ideas:

1. Historians are interested in sources, evidence, facts and artifacts. That's the basis of all history.
2. Events, structures, processes, sequences, and patterns. Historians look for patterns.
3. Always questions of significance, justification and change. So you can see these AMIA lists, not that unusual for a historian to look at. We're constantly asking this question of significance.
4. Interpretation and explanation. Which we derive from theory and method.

What I've noticed is a lot of younger historians in the field of film, I call it "one theory-one artifact." They read one book: Todorov, Hayden White, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida. They got their one book. They've really memorized it. They are good students. And then they have their one artifact: some one weird thing they found that happens to be in the one archive where they are. Some film, some therapist's shot of some autistic child, one amateur film they found in their parents' garage, one piece of amateur porn that their gay uncle shot. So, one theory, one film. This is really bothersome to me because of course it's not enough sources, it's not enough patterning, and of course, I think it's extremely problematic on all kinds of issues to do this. And what you find are lots of very clever wordplays but no advancing of our knowledge and no dialogue with our community.

So what does amateur film do to these traditional historiographic claims? These are just the ways we think about history. Get ready because I'm going to really mess it up.

1. Sources. Any archivist here knows, and you've all asked me this, what the hell is amateur film? What is it? Most of it is lost. Everyone here knows 50% of commercial films before 1950 are lost. 90% of silent films. Bill O'Farrell and others I've spoken with said we have no idea what the percentage is for amateur. So most of it is lost. We are dealing with Atlantis here: lost, underwater. Most of it is lost. So what do we do there? Because most of it is lost we have this problem of what kind of artifacts are we saving because every artifact we get is completely incomplete. Now, I find this theoretically

extremely exciting because it's messy. But some people, this drives them crazy.

2. Events. We don't have events in amateur film. We have only very uneven structures, very uneven patterns, and the patterns are only beginning to emerge as Dwight and others who've seen a lot of these works can begin to tell you. Because we don't have events, we have to be very careful that we just don't just "amateur equals home-movie." I think this is completely dangerous and I think it is a monologic force. But we have to see amateur as a range of practices.
3. Significance and justification, historiographically, because we have so much lost material and so many absences, becomes absolutely paramount. I think all we should do today is talk about significance and justification. Now some of the justifications you get, and I'm going to give you four of them here, and these are ones I've heard over the last two or three years. And I do want to say that this question of significance is so important because when I was writing Reel Families there were only two archives in the U.S. that had amateur film: Human Studies Film Archives and Northeast Historic Film. The reason Karen Ishizuka and I are doing the book is now there are archives everywhere that have work. And there's more of an emphasis on the artifact, rather than on the discourse.

   So, what are some of the arguments that are made?

   First we want to make a claim for the everyday, for the quotidian, as being part of democracy. This is an argument made by Roger Odin in France; it's a big argument you hear in Latin America and it's an argument we need to revivify here in North America.

   Two, an argument coming out of feminism and the civil rights that there's a range of voices in film that are absent. The voices of women, the voices of Asians, African-Americans, Latinos, mixed race people, children. Great absences in the archives.

   Three, for some archives, amateur is all they have. I call it a post- '89 Berlin Wall syndrome. It's all they have. In countries that didn't exist, they didn't have a national film industry. Now they're a country, what do they do? In some countries, because of US-Hollywood domination in Latin America, there was no indigenous industry, so there's great interest in amateur film as indigenous material. An example of this would be the Wales Film Archive. I learned Wales is an oppressed Third World country when I was there. They feel oppressed by Great Britain and they did an amazing show where they took newsreels of Wales shot by the British newsreel units and compared it with amateur films and it was all about Druids, so I was really excited. We have this emerging of places that don't have these film histories.

Fourth, the archives are somewhat congruent with certain trends in the academy and in intellectual life. I'll give you a sense of some of those shifts, and they're shifts that have happened in the last quarter of a century. The notion of history from below: the history of working people, women, minorities. This is a big move in historiography. A form of history, which is called the New History, which is the idea that the job of historians is to find new sources and additional materials and it's a shift in thought which is often referred to as a linguistic term by historiographers. Using semiotics and deconstruction to find new sources. I think the New History is just copying what artists have been doing since the '50s, but that's another story.

Another is the development of cultural studies, which sees the everyday, and everyday small acts of resistance as important as the big demonstrations. Post-structuralism, which is interested in deconstructing power, which I think is what amateur film is about.

And something which people call the New Film History, which is a recovery of the absences. Tom Gunning was telling me that he sees this as the recovery of the lost object. We see new histories of documentary, I'd like to particularly note Dan Streible's book on Emil DeAntonio. DeAntonio is probably one of the most under-known great filmmaker in America. Barnouw's book of course. Experimental film, the work of Scott MacDonald. Silent film: Tricia's contributing to this as well. Other marginal areas: sleaze film, Eric Schaefer's book is something I would recommend.

And finally, in the last ten years, I think again driven by the needs of the present, there has been an interest in trauma. A return of the real after the surface of postmodernism. Prompted, I think, I would argue by the genocides in Bosnia, Rwanda, Cambodia and Colombia. Where theorists and historians are interested in the return of the real. Things that happen in material life that are traumatic and need to be recovered. A lot of this work is Holocaust-driven. But the real bulk of a lot of trauma studies as it is now called is trying to move away from just The Holocaust to other holocausts. Big H to small h.

And finally and most importantly, I think the archival shift coordinates with a congruency with what's happening with artists and filmmakers. And technological shifts. First of all, archival and compilation work has been used for about 25-30 years to tell new stories beyond what we often call in history The Great Story. Works like *Eyes on the Prize*, *The War at Home*, many works on PBS, ITVS. Trying to recover stories from the sea of stories.

And also at the other end, artists who are working with the idea of disjunctures in these stories. So rather than a smooth story, disjunctures.

And some of these artists are Peter Forgacs, Richard Fung (a Canadian), Rea Tajiri, Craig Baldwin, the Media Collective, Big Noise Films, Paper Tiger. All working with this question of disjunctions, and working with contiguities.

Secondly, another congruency is a development of new technology. You may wonder, why are we talking about digital? What do new technologies do? They weaken the policing of authorship, intellectual property rights and copyright. And they create a circulation of images.

And you see many artists reprocessing all kinds of found images and amateur films. And one them is actually sitting in our audience, John Knecht, who's been doing this work for about 30 years in video, film and installation. He teaches at Colgate. And I had your name here before I knew you were here-just so you know.

What do we say then about amateur film historiography, in terms of evidence and explanation? I'm going to give you four things in this list.

Amateur's significance is always shifting and it's undecidable. That's Jacques Derrida talk for what you deal with in your daily life if you're an archivist. What is this, what do we do with it?

1. We're always dealing with new evidence and new artifacts. We have to keep reminding ourselves this will never ever be complete.
2. We must always invent, analytically, new contiguities. New things that can pop against other things. I think right now the question of regional identities is so massively important for a million different reasons.
3. Following the theorists Gayatri Spivak and Hayden White, what are we interested in? The transformation of history and society? Why save this stuff if it doesn't produce some kind of change, either in thinking or in life?
4. We cannot forget we are interested in agency. This is a big issue for historians. Agency.

Now I'm going to do something that I know Dan likes. I'm going to throw some bombs out there for everybody. This is how we're going to end. We're going to end with axioms of amateur film historiography, and dangers. Here are the axioms:

1. Amateur film is not a map but a mapping. It's not an object, it's a process. It's micro-histories and it's not nationalistic. I think we should be careful of following anything that's nationalistic.
2. Following this idea I got from Dwight where he said, What do we do with films where people from Maine went and shot in South Africa? This got me thinking. What is a microhistory? It's not simply local and regional. It is a hybrid, a hip term from the theorist Homi Bhabha. But I would just like to

proletarianize this theory and say that every artifact of amateur film is a hybrid between the local, the regional, national and global. It's a kind of gumbo. And it's also a hybrid between the psychic (that is psychoanalytic) and the political.

3. Amateur film is a continual rewriting of history into histories and it's always going to be incomplete. We have to relish its incompleteness.
4. We are not just dealing with objects here. I'm very nervous about objects and we can theorize this later. Objects make me nervous. They can become religious objects. Instead, we're looking at practices. I just want to give you the list I came up with in the car while my husband was looking at sailboats in every harbor on the coast of Maine. In this amateur film world there's home movies, surveillance, porn, sleaze, documentaries, industrials, political work, hobbyists, art amateurs, emergent subjectivities, minority discourses. So what I'm going to argue here is for shifting from a collection of objects towards a multiplication of objects, practices, zones and represntations. I'm going to throw out some theory here since it seems appropriate. Since I'm a professor. I'm going to argue we need to unsettle traumatic absences. Unsettle and mess up that which is trauma and absence.
5. We have to unsettle all borders. This means that amateur film is a continual process of contention and debate. And it's contention and debate over who speaks, from what position, and what kind of power. You can read Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, or you can just write those three things down and avoid buying the book and reading it. Who speaks, from what position, what kind of power?
6. These texts and artifacts are texts without closure. They're not finished. They are, as Shoshana Felman, the wonderful psychoanalyst of trauma says, that breakage of a text shows the breakage of the psyche. Because they're unmade we have to use psychoanalysis-and I know there are some other speakers today who will be talking about that.
7. These artifacts of amateur film, what are they? They are psychic imaginaries of real things, and they're real things which are psychic imaginaries. Or, to translate, they are facts which are fictions-and they are fictions which are facts. That's kind of one of those Derrida playful things, but I think if you've watched amateur film it actually makes sense.
8. Amateur film is a series of active relationships between the maker and the subject, the maker and the community, the film and history, representation and history, the local and the global, the real and imaginary. We can't get stuck on these things as being inert or we're going to again be lost. What are they? They are dreamscapes. And what we need to do is move the public to the private in a more fluid relationship. To move the familialized gaze or the family gaze to a collective gaze. To move individual memory and commemoration to collective memory. And to move memory to history. History can be shared memory-can only be done in psychoanalysis, many people say.

Now what are the dangers that lurk here? I've been looking with my husband at sailboats here on the rocky coast, I got this idea that I'd better tell you what the dangers are. What are the dangers in working with amateur film? I say the dangers look like a reef the keel on our boat can crash into. So I have seven dangers. Some of you have heard some of these although Dan and Bill you'll be glad to know I've done a little more research.

1. We have to be aware of the danger of nostalgia for a legacy medium of film in the age of digitalization. I have never seen more people fetishize celluloid than now. I feel like these are Druids worshipping sprocket holes. We have to be really careful of this because it's a way to create stability where there isn't any. I have been at conferences where I've seen people who have digitized amateur footage and put it on CD-ROMS or put it on videotapes to get it in their community get nailed by the purer fetishists who say No, no, no. You can only show it on film. If you're only going to show it on film as reference copy then who is going to see it? Not even me. And let me tell you a story about this. I was Fellow at the British Film Institute in 1992. They invited me there to do stuff on amateur film. I did not get to see one scrap of film. They say, You can work with the paper archives-and so I gave my talk like this. I had to ship the amateur film from the Ithaca College library over to the British Film Institute. And then they attacked me for not talking about British amateur film. And I felt like it was the Revolutionary War. You have this huge collection, they said it will take at least five years to make the print. I couldn't believe it. I hate to sound like a nationalist but I like the Americans and Canadians because the idea is, Get the stuff out there. This is what I mean about nostalgia. It really bothers me.
2. There's a danger because are always scared of fluidities, the multiple and unofficial. There's nothing that makes officials in governments more nervous or people in my institution, my dean, than saying I'm going to teach courses and I'm going to use all this marginal stuff. I don't know where I'm going to get it from and I'm going to mix up the amateur films with this film and guess what, it's going to cost a lot of money. Oh, my god, please show Hitchcock. So we have to beware out there that people have a fear of fluidity and of multiplicity. They have a great fear of it.
3. We must be very aware of the dangers of immobilizing and ossifying amateur film artifacts into monuments. Creating fetish objects or cathedrals where we can have transcendent experiences watching amateur film. I suggest you save that for your zen retreats. In Ithaca we have a lot of Buddhists and everyone meditates. I think this is very dangerous. Here I want to say this isn't just me arguing this. The theorist Giorgio Agamben, Italian theorist in a book, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, says The greatest danger to politics is the danger of monuments because monuments immobilize us and ask us to have awe rather than action.

4. We have to beware that we dispose of all this messiness, contradictions and cracks. And we dispose of it and we just decide in amateur film there are genres, there are moguls, there are auteurs. If we do that it is very dangerous for millions of reasons.
5. Finally, we don't want to delimit amateur film and just say it's evidence. I think this is what PBS does quite a lot in these documentaries. I had a friend who was on the ITVS panel and she said there's a formula now for getting a grant and any artist here knows this. Find your minority identity, find a trauma, mix it up. Get some people who speak in testimony, find amateur film that shows you have a screwed-up life. And I'm on the board of Women Make Movies. I watch hundreds of these things every year. This is very formulaic. And what does it do? It treats the amateur film as evidence. My mother didn't like me. Here's a shot of her chasing me with a hose. My father was mean to me. Here's my father not letting me drive the car when I'm ten years old. My idea is to beware of this issue of evidence and to know that fact and fiction are an exchange. The novelist from Martinique, Patrick Chamoiseau, in an incredible book called Texaco, a novel, says fact and fiction let's be honest, they're just a braid.
6. We have to remember to not forget historical traumas. That should be guiding us. Not just great auteurs, or whatever, but historical traumas that are beyond World War II and beyond Vietnam. The traumas of race, the traumas of gender, the traumas of nation-states and how they treat us. The traumas of class. And the traumas, dare we say it, of family. I think all of us come from families-they're both good and bad-and any of us who have done therapy know that there are traumas there. And I think this footage holds those traumas.
7. And lastly, we have to beware of focusing on what is there rather than what is not there. I think we're all in the process here of looking at the great unknown and the great absence. And we have to enjoy this.

I'm going to conclude by quoting Vladimir Lenin, who wrote a book called *What is to be Done*. What is to be done? And I have, again, a list.

1. First, we have to invent a new historiography where change, which is what historians are interested in, is thought about differently.
2. We need to create heteroglossolalia. If you are Catholic like me you know what heteroglossolalia is. It's called speaking in tongues. And I think that's what we need. A speaking in tongues for amateur film. Where gender, race, region, class, different nation-states commingle. Where we're looking at not just images of race and gender but processes of racialization and gendering and nationalization.
3. The quotidian, the everyday, and the mundane have mysteries and everyday life is important. I get worried about the National Film Registry only picking films of trauma and films of art. I'd like to see some of these films that are

just a woman documenting her family there. Not just these great things, although I understand the move to do that completely, and I agree with it.

4. We have to move from continuities to contiguities. We need to work with dislocations and contradictions and ruptures.
5. This is me playing around. The private is public, the public is private. The familial is collective and the collective is familial. And we have to realize we're not in the history business, we're in the moving business. We're movers. We're trying to restore the dialectic to all of this.
6. How do we do this? We need to create fugue structures. In Bach music, fugues are where many voices overlap and new structures are created where we hear and see new things through the fugue. Now in film, this has been theorized since the 1929s by a filmmaker named Dziga Vertov, who argued for dialectical montage where when you put things together contiguously you create new ideas. And I think that's what we need to do.
7. Finally, we need to mobilize the films and find them by being clear about what the needs of the present are. And as many historians, and particularly Giorgio Agamben has said, We need to reach beyond the self to others to create community in all that we do every day. So what Tzevan Todorov writes in this regard is, Far from remaining prisoners of the past, we must put it to the service of the present, just as memory and forgetting should be used in the service of justice. And I would argue that we involved in amateur film are clearly in the service of justice. Our job is to create unsettledness, to stay fluid, to keep our messy rooms, to keep looking, and to create the future.

Now, in closing, I'd like to actually close by pirating Erik Barnouw, who at every Flaherty Seminar he attended gave what he called the closing benediction. And I thought it would be kind of fun to give the closing benediction at the opening. In 1972 the famous filmmaker Chris Marker from France was at the Flaherty showing his work. This is at the height of the anti-war movement. And during the Q&A many people were quite in awe of his conceptual ability to wield all kinds of footage and edit it together in a whole. There was a young, young film student who asked the following question. Mr. Marker, however do you figure out what comes after what? How does it all fit together? And Chris Marker replied, I get lost. Now Erik Barnouw told that story and then would say to the assembled crowds as his final words, Now, everyone go and get lost. Thank you.

Questions

I want to be really careful and delineate how I'm using the word trauma. I'm not using the word trauma like the way my husband who's in public health would use it, like trauma unit: something happens and you go. I'm using it really the way psychoanalytic historians would use it. These are people like

Giorgio Agamben, Shoshana Felman, people like this. And the idea there is that we often think of trauma as only being death and wars, major events. But in fact one of the arguments that gets made in a lot of this work is that every event is a dialectic between the utopian and between the catastrophic. Between the dreamscape and catastrophe. Every event. And that every image also is a dialectic between its utopian happy veneer, because images are made within the matrix of hope. Yet within it also lies traumatic kernels. And often the trauma is difficult to recover but it is necessary to recover it in order to narrate and tell history.

It's kind of a theoretical argument. So I'm not really using the word trauma to just mean my father beat me up and didn't listen to me. But to really argue that, and this is along the lines of in some ways now conventional historiography of the last 20 years, that every change, which is what historians are interested in, bespeaks a trauma. Because every change bespeaks loss.

And part of the argument I'm trying to make is that for many historians, particularly I think people in documentary, which is the other world I live in, trauma is always positioned as these huge big events: the Vietnam War, Bosnia, Rwanda, World War II. And what we're looking at in positioning this is to argue two things: very simply, one that these big events imprint, infuse the quotidian. And they're difficult to discern. And secondly, that within the quotidian and the everyday there resides trauma.

And yes, when the things are made things are making them in a happy way. However, everyone from Roland Barthes to Hayden White to Julianne Hirsch has argued all images live in this contradiction between their hope of continuity and their sense of loss. So my argument is to restore this, because the first thing you always hear about amateur things is they're happy. And yeah, they are if you look at them. But again, if we're just looking at the footage and we're not deploying or mobilizing contiguities you're going to lose that. Let me just concretize this a little bit.

I know it's hard to go in these areas and this is really new work for me and I appreciate the comment. The example David gave of the advertising, I think part of Karen Ishizuka and my quest for trauma, or to put trauma into the way we think about amateur film images, is to see what some Canadian archivists have called "footage vultures." People out there getting footage all over the place, taking vans, getting footage and then selling it for commercials. Now all of us in media know why there's been such traffic in images. It's cheap to reproduce images. We could get into a whole economic analysis of this, but it's cheaper to recycle images than it is to make your own productions now. So we can see there the happy use. The mobilization

in music videos and advertising of these happy images. Man, in the days before computers, I was happy. I know I was. Etcetera.

And this is a mobilization of the affirmative. It's a mobilization of a unified history, and it's a mobilization of amateur films as evidence. I've seen this actually, sadly, in a lot of PBS documentaries in the post NEH/NEA crises. You see that constantly. So I would counterpose that to what a lot of artists are doing who are working with this, where the idea is, even in the simplest image, to edit for contiguities and dialectical montages to basically create new kinds of historical knowledge.

In other words, the juxtapositions and collisions are what create knowledge, not the image itself. Again, John Knecht's work, Peter Forgacs, Rea Tajiri. A lot of this comes out of feminist work, I think, where you're looking at these disjunctions. So I want to be really careful to say the traumas are often not in the images. The idea of the trauma is a real psychoanalytic way to think about history in terms of loss and recovery. It's kind of theoretical.

One good example would be if you've seen the Topaz footage of the internment camps. Probably everyone here has seen it, right? Everybody always says, well where's the trauma? It just looks like everyday life. And yet people arguing well, it was an act of resistance just to shoot that image in the internment camp because cameras were outlawed. The same thing I would say about the amateur films in the Smalfilm Museum in Holland. Many many works shot during the German occupation of Holland. And I've watched a lot of them with some graduate students over there. I'll tell you, my eye when I look at them, all I see are happy families. And they'll point out in the corner is the end of a menorah. Or they'll point out to me, it's all shot inside. Very important because they know from doing historical research the Nazis did not allow amateur cameras in the streets in Holland. Do you see what I'm saying? In other words you can't find the trauma without the contiguity and the contiguities I think need to be driven by very moral ethical issues of justice. We find them in different kinds of ways.

[Inaudible]

The footage that's on the National Film Registry, take Zapruder and Topaz. I was thinking about that and I was thinking why isn't there footage of wife abuse and wife beating?

Why isn't that considered as equal? Or sick children. Those are traumas, but they are traumas that are domesticated and therefore often not seen as significant. Now of course probably everybody out there would say boy, you can't find footage like that. But it's just a point I make as a case in point from a different kind of historical point of view.

[Inaudible question about "What the foootage is"]

Can you talk a little more when you use this term, "What this footage actually is?" What do you mean by that?

Yes, exactly, I think we agree. Let me just map this out really easily. One thing I would argue is to use this term, What the footage is, is the place to start. We know nothing if we don't start there. And I would urge us to do what a lot of historians have done which is to use the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who argued for something called deep description. And I think that this is what we need to do is do what Dwight and other archivists do, is watch this stuff really, really carefully and see what kinds of constructions, images, are there. These images are much messier, though, than looking at other images. And having watched a lot of them over 20 years, I have to tell you all my film training is useless. I'm trained to looking at formal languages. What do you do when you have this other language? And because there is this other language at work and I don't speak that language I was really drawn to psychoanalytic trauma theory because it was a way in to looking at incompleteness and messiness as a kind of manifestation of psychic breaks and traces.

So when we look at "what it is" we actually don't know what it is. You can't deploy the formal or aesthetic strategies we know from narrative film, documentary or experimental film onto it. And I've seen lots of people do that. Looking for narrative tropes. Looking for documentary, looking for experimental. Find a grad student, find a theory, find a genre. Find an artifact and you can do it. And I feel like that's too easy to do. Do you follow me? Too easy, play a game, it's a chess move.

So I'd like to argue to go from the artifact out. To look at it carefully and to ask what languages is it speaking? For me one of the answers was psychoanalytic trauma theory, which is not just about unhappiness, but about breakages. You say that's happy footage. Yet what Dwight saw was a lot of drinking. Case in point, it's all how we look at things.

And the second thing I would say is yeah, importing trauma to it. Of course. I think it's dangerous to just stay in the object alone because I think that that is not historiographic. We're going to import lots of different contiguities and modalities. And probably what I would import is different than what you would import. I just have to be fair, part of my interest in trauma really is a response to a lot of academic trends and trends in filmmaking of just surface postmodernism. I found it very politically troubling.

So I do what Derrida asks, or Todorov asks, I'm taking the needs of the present, where certain political issues really concern me, and I'm trying to

mine the past through that vision. Ten years from now I might deploy different contiguities, or you might have different contiguities. My point is not that one set of contiguities or references should be privileged over another, do you follow what I'm saying, but that we're kind of mobilizing different things to always argue significance.

[Inaudible audience comments]

We actually agree and if you will allow you to give me a historical note on that, Frances Flaherty, who people do not know was actually a collaborator of Bob, and that's sexist film history for you, actually studied Teilhard de Chardin and Zen Buddhism. And she started the Flaherty Seminars on exactly that idea. And the idea in Zen Buddhism and Teilhard de Chardin, the Catholic theorist, was non-preconception. That you approach material without ideas. In Zen, I read her writings, she says open door all the time. You leave the doors open and you let it come in without a preconception.

But then that close reading needs to go somewhere, right? We need to always ask that historiographic question of Why is it significant? And that's where I think a lot of this theory I'm proposing might be mobilized. But I couldn't agree with you more. That I think it's the way most film professors try to teach. For example in my school knowing people bring a lot of preconceptions to cinema we don't tell students--borrowing from the Flaherty Seminar--what they're going to see in advance. We don't tell them. We just go and make weird combinations and we often change on the fly as we see the response of the audience. It's the same idea. I just have to underscore what you've said about the necessity of closely watching and throwing out our other historiographic preconceptions. One of my arguments is if we start taking what we know from film history and applying it to all of these marginal areas we're not going to learn anything. I agree. I love what you said. Thank you all.