

# **The Home Movie 4.0:**

(co)creative strategies for a tacit, embodied and affective  
reading of the Sicilian home movie archive

Ruxandra Lupu

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School of Media and Communication

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*To the two filmmakers in my life, my father Aurel and my husband Alfredo.  
To you both I owe my obsession with home movies and the inspiration that made this  
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# ABSTRACT

The home movie has always been a borderline film category that breaks with cinematic standards and occupies a liminal position between the artistic and non-artistic domain. The very nature of these films has rendered traditional analytical frames such as film analysis, ethnographic investigation and participatory practices not only hard to apply, but also ineffectual for opening their meaning to a public made of specialist and non-specialist audiences. Sicilian home movies in particular constitute an underexplored yet rich field of enquiry. In my project, I deal with Sicilian home movies and the way we can reimagine their role as social objects in an increasingly digital context.

The aim of the project is to find new methods and forms of expression that make these films more relatable. Bergson's concept of actualization provides a suitable theoretical frame for conceptualizing new ways of looking at and engaging with these archives. Using this frame, I develop a practice-led approach that deploys creative interventions such as drawing, ethnographic interventions and participatory exercises, as tools materialising this broader vision. This gives rise to an iterative process that explores practice against theory and theory against practice and creates new constructs dealing with the tacit, sensuous and affective in these archives. These modalities challenge traditional methods by asking if and how we can produce a different and disembodied way of knowing the archive that is deeply rooted in lived experience. They also give rise to looser ways of investigation that render aesthetic experience more inclusive and participative.

The novel methodology with its associated reading modalities and the interactive documentary offering a different way of engaging with Sicilian archives, have been collated into the project website [www.homemoviesicily.com](http://www.homemoviesicily.com). They can benefit both researchers, artists and communities of non-specialist audiences. Furthermore, the project opens up two future research directions. The first looks at how we could take tools like the interactive documentary into the mainstream. The second envisages how creative exercises can give rise to further interaction modalities. Both directions represent a modest but important step for the future of these archives.



# Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 Introduction. ....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2 Framing the Sicilian home movie archive. ....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3. ....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>A methodological approach to actualizing the archive.....</b>	<b>24</b>
3.1 <i>Practicing actualizations of the home movie .....</i>	27
3.2 <i>Actualizing home movie practices.....</i>	30
3.3 <i>From imagination to imaginative methodologies.....</i>	34
<b>CHAPTER 4 Methodology. ....</b>	<b>39</b>
4.1 <i>Impact and originality of the method .....</i>	39
4.2 <i>Research plan.....</i>	41
4.3 <i>The gestural in the Sicilian Home Movie .....</i>	45
4.4 <i>Novel modalities of reading the Sicilian Home Movie.....</i>	52
4.4.1 <i>Tacit modality.....</i>	52
4.4.2 <i>Embodied modality .....</i>	53
4.4.3 <i>Affective modality .....</i>	54
<b>CHAPTER 5. ....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>What my hands know: guidelines to a non-verbal reading of the Sicilian archive or THE TACIT MODALITY ...</b>	<b>56</b>
5.1 <i>Looking for the third meaning in Sicilian home movies.....</i>	58
5.2 <i>The invisible space of the gestural in drawing .....</i>	62
5.3 <i>Surfaces of contact.....</i>	64
5.4 <i>Conclusions.....</i>	70
<b>CHAPTER 6. ....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>What my body knows: an ethnographic staging of the Sicilian home movie or THE EMBODIED MODALITY ..</b>	<b>72</b>
6.1 <i>Between the body and embodiment, senses and the sensible.....</i>	75
6.2 <i>Sonic landscapes .....</i>	78
6.3 <i>Somatic postcards.....</i>	83
6.3 <i>Conclusions.....</i>	88
<b>CHAPTER 7. ....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Knowing together: co-creating the Sicilian home movie experience or THE AFFECTIVE MODALITY .....</b>	<b>90</b>
7.1 <i>Affective medium .....</i>	97
7.2 <i>Affective performativity .....</i>	99
7.3 <i>Affective encounters .....</i>	103
7.3.1 <i>Affection-image.....</i>	104

7.3.2 Participatory process.....	104
7.4 Results.....	105
7.4.1 Cracking the Established order workshop projects (CtEO).....	106
7.4.2 Innovate Heritage workshop projects .....	108
7.5 Conclusions.....	114
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>126</b>

# CHAPTER 1.

## Introduction

What if, rather than creating an archive of the already gone, digital media were used to orchestrate a renewal of life? to thicken and deepen time beyond the present? to fill the world not with data, but with a multi-sensory pulse of poetry and possibility? How to extend such worlds of sensuous kinship to others? How to use digital light and coloured pixels not just to draw strangers close, but to disrupt categories and easy assumptions and so to clear the way for new affinities? (Deger, 2017, p.318)

Jennifer Deger's reflection proves that while archivists have thought a great deal about the implications of digital archives, they still have to reflect on how these cultural assets will work socially. What might sound as an ideal, if not utopic vision, regarding the use of digital media represents an important if not essential condition for the survival of the archive.<sup>1</sup> What Deger proposes is the possibility of shifting our attention from the challenges posed by the World Wide Web for the social operability of these materials, to the field of opportunities that digital media can give rise to for the archival sector. In other words, can we imagine digital media uses and formats that can transform the way we look at and interact with these collections? What Deger invites us to do is not to think *about* the archive in the digital era, but rather to think *with* the archive in terms of digital resonance. This way of formulating the archival discourse fuels a poetical vision that does not envisage the digital space and the archive as two different things (content vs. container), but rather as interconnected. In doing so, it makes space for transdisciplinary investigation possibilities that aim to understand if we can foster a way of knowing the archive other than through the exclusive lens of academic inquiry. How does the digital enable us to explore alternative ways of viewing and using the archive, by imagining this virtual space as one made of multi-sensory pulses of poetry and possibility that ignites new understandings of and interests in these collections? In my project, I use Deger's interesting reflection as a point of departure for exploring new ways of thinking about Sicilian home movie archives that are not constrained by an academic tradition that is remote from most of the people who want to look at these materials. In doing so, I investigate how artistic practice can transform disciplinary thinking and the methodologies traditionally connected to the

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<sup>1</sup> I deploy the definition provided by The National Archives that looks at the archive as a collection of information known as records, which can be public or private and represent primary resources of information. Source: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/start-here/what-are-archives/>



investigation of the home movie – film analysis, ethnographic enquiry and participatory research – to open our understanding of the home movie towards a poetics of digital potential that sustains novel reading modalities and enables us to imagine an archive *of* and *for* the future.

Deger's reflection on the use of digital archives affects particularly the home movie, a personal or domestic record capturing and preserving fragments of private memory, usually filmed by an amateur.<sup>2</sup> As records produced inside and reflecting the intimate universe of families and communities, home movies possess an important social value. Initially regarded as a tool to record family life, the home movie was not intended to circulate outside the intimate space of the family (Chalfen 1987 and Odin 2008). These films were invariably produced for the family, to be shared together with family members during get-togethers or other significant events. This is why the owners of these films did not initially think about a potential public use of their collections. Yet, with the passage of time and through the emergence of private and institutional archives specialised in collecting and preserving this type of audio-visual records, access to home movies not only became easier, but also pointed to their relevance outside the personal sphere (Zimmermann, 1995). Today, scholars, curators, archivists and artists alike argue for the recognition of this footage as historical, sociocultural and artistic records and thus as an important part of community heritage (McNamara et al., 2017). In doing so they frame the home movie from disciplinary positions that fall principally within three major directions: the visual or semiotic perspective sustained by the film and media sector, the ethnographic and historical perspective promoted by the social sciences and the participatory perspective promoted by archival practices, as well as the reuse of these films for creative purposes.

In film studies, the home movie finds its place more easily, perhaps, considering that its development has run in parallel to the birth of cinema. As a film genre, the home movie has been included in the broader category of amateur/ non-fiction film, sitting alongside other sub-categories such as the filmed diary, experimental cinema and private cinema (Simoni, 2015). Film analysis has framed the home movie's specific semiotic structure from different perspectives: first as a 'home mode' (Chalfen, 1987), which refers to the amateur photographer or filmmaker's representation of the private world of the family, and then as a 'space of communication' (Odin, 2008), a theoretical sphere determined by the private viewing of home movies and their subsequent public circulation. On the other hand, media studies have explored the history of the amateur medium (Aasman, 2014) and formal aspects connected to film

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<sup>2</sup> Code of Ethics" Federacion Internationale des Archives du Film (FIAF) (Brussels: FIAF, 1998), retrieved on 22 June 2017 from: <http://www.fiafnet.org/pages/Community/Code-Of-Ethics.html>.

practice (Cavallotti, 2019), aesthetics (Fossati, 2018), memory (Van der Heijden, 2015), or audience engagement (Fowler et al., 2017). These disciplinary investigations are complemented by cross- and interdisciplinary initiatives that brought new ways of looking at the home movie archive. Liz Czach, Heather Norris Nicholson and Laura Marks are some examples of scholars who have interrogated already established meanings of the amateur film. Distancing herself from the semiotic line of enquiry, Liz Czach's *Home Movies and Amateur Film as National Cinema* (2014) suggests that amateur film can, in fact, become a national cinema, in the absence of mainstream cinema. Likewise, Heather Norris Nicholson's *Cinemas of Catastrophe and Continuity* (2014) points to the need to approach home movies as a vernacular art form. Last but not least, Laura Marks' *Skin of the Film* (2000) calls for an affective film theory that draws on phenomenology, postcolonial and feminist theory, anthropology and cognitive science, to expose the film archive as an embodied experience.

The social sciences on the other hand, tapped into the home movie as a resource for understanding traditions, cultural backgrounds and behaviour patterns (Czach, 2014). Ethnographic and anthropologic research for example deploys home movies as tools of analysis, next to ethnographer's video footage, indigenous footage or events videoed by informants (Pink, 2011), insofar as they represent "critical clues to understanding how people presented themselves and their worlds in the twentieth century" (McNamara et al., 2017, p.105). Engaging with home movies as records or evidence of the past, historical studies have dealt with such footage as micro-history (Zimmermann, 1995), recognising its capacity to act as counter-narratives to traditional historical narrative.

Last but not least, the participatory strand looks at archival praxis and the reuse of these films for creative purposes. Archival studies explore these films as personal or domestic records, the associated practices of collecting, safeguarding and disseminating them (Smith, 2018 and Swanson, 2012) and the digital impact on collections (Fossati 2018 and Prelinger 2019). The creative reuse of home movies instead deals with the interest of artists and filmmakers in these materials, with regard to the potential of reutilising them in their artistic works and falls into what is called the remix culture. The reuse or remix culture is, according to de Certeau, a society that allows and encourages derivative works by combining or editing existing materials to produce new products. It refers to the practice of remix that is a recycling technique (de Certeau, 2001) developed as a result of the passage from a read-only culture, where we could only view online audio-visual products, to a read-write culture where we can reuse some images and footage from the Internet, supported by laws such as *Creative Commons*

and *Best Practices in Fair Use*. I will discuss more in-depth the creative reuse of home movies in the next chapter, under the *Actualizing home movie practices* section.

While these disciplinary investigations show that the study of such archives as bearers of community memory (Brunow, 2015), heritage assets (Cameron et al., 2007) and artistic repositories (Van Alphen, 2015) has gained momentum, they also uncover the little attention offered to how these archives can operate socially in an increasingly digital context. In fact, there is a sort of parallel universe in which these films are dealt with on a regular basis by a public other than scholars, archivists or curators. Outside this more specialistic and academic context, we find an ‘underground’ world of the home movie archive, where communities of people keep selling/buying these films on Ebay or local markets, set up and share their personal or community heritage collections on YouTube, build around them fan communities or initiate their own creative projects based on these films (Prelinger, 2019). Whereas we know that academic tradition works, as evidenced by the increasing research interest in home movies, there is also the other community-led side of the archive that points through examples of self-managed grassroots projects<sup>3</sup> at how these objects can work socially, *while* at the same time making use of the digital space to self-organise. These practices of sharing and building communities around archives are therefore valuable for the future of the home movie archive as they can make institutional archives thrive. A good example thereof is the case of the Home Movie Day event.<sup>4</sup> Organised yearly across the world as a combination of open days, workshops, screenings and other forms of engagement with local communities, these events testify to the fact that the ‘life’ of the archive lies in the way people can relate to these collections, how they can build their own meanings thereof. In order to do this, we need a mix of hands-on practices and specialist knowledge that is able to develop activities and approaches that speak to a broad public. Such events demonstrate also that what we really want to recognise in these films is their emotional response, the non-formalised textual approach that tells us what is important for communities to find in this material. How can we think about an archive for the future without thinking first about these communities that make a direct use of them and the value that they have for them (Ferrari, 2013)? Without finding ways to make these collections relatable for this public, these archives risk being reduced to silence (Fowler et al., 2017). As Jennifer Deger suggests, what we will manage to build are mere archives of the

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<sup>3</sup> A good example of grassroots project is the *Archivio degli Iblei*, a digital platform collecting archival material (photos, letters, diaries, videos, oral stories etc) of the Iblei community in Sicily.

<sup>4</sup> More information about local events organised in the frame of the Home Movie Day can be found here: <https://www.centerforhomemovies.org/hmd/>.

already gone, to which we can look up with nostalgia and scientific interest, but little spark of curiosity for what they mean to us or what they can ‘do’ for us.

In a digital universe oversaturated by content creation, such records representing the already gone become burdened artefacts, insofar as the vocabularies necessary for decoding them will belong increasingly to past generations rather than to future ones (Prelinger, 2019). Young generations of digital users have already a vague idea about what these films represent, passed on to them by their grandfathers or uncles who used to engage in the production of these films. As new generations of digital users continue to emerge, these films promise to remain pure museum exhibits, revealing their meaning only to a small portion of knowledgeable people. On the other hand, through the diversification of the public fostered by online accessibility comes also the question of ‘use’: how can people engage with such repositories? Rick Prelinger points to two main issues surrounding the preservation, use and accessibility of these archives: “access to personal records is one issue, long-term, infinite-capacity, robust, and sustainable storage another” (Prelinger, 2019, p.33). Yet maybe one of the most delicate problems surrounding the digital future of the home movie archive (Aasman, 2019, Moore et al., 2016, Prelinger, 2019) is the curatorial aspect (Sabharwal, 2015). How do we organise these repositories in a format that is efficient, understandable and appealing for the public? Digital display modalities are definitely altering our traditional cataloguing practices and taxonomies, by making us engage with the concept of user interaction (Sabharwal, 2015, p. 109). Nevertheless, in the process of ‘digital migration’ of collections, most of the times institutional archives translate their analogue archiving practices into digital format<sup>5</sup> without tapping into the affordances of the digital or the subtleties of the digital space in shaping the user experience. While browsing collections is now a click away, are we making good use of the organisation possibilities that the digital offers to us? On a parallel note to Jennifer Deger, I argue that we are currently not able to imagine a home archive *of* and *for* the future if we continue relying mainly on academic tradition and archival practices to orchestrate the digital space of the archive. To overcome this, we need to explore how we can make these collections relatable for communities, how we can open them to different modalities of understanding that renders them ‘alive’ again, both at physical and digital level.

This proposition clashes against a still predominant use of the archive that privileges the “personal, familial or documentary aspects” (Gracy in McNamara et al., 2017, p.105) over

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<sup>5</sup> The institutional archives that I visited in Palermo and Bologna have translated their paper records of their collections into digital files.

other potential ways of looking at these records. In her article exploring the heritage value of such objects, Karan Gracy points to the dominating tendency to approach these collections from a historical perspective, to grasp them as “evidence of events in the lives of their creators” (Gracy in McNamara et al., 2017, p.105). In fact, when analysing the archiving practices for the corpus of footage that I deal with in my project, I often came across the use of interviews conducted with members of the families who donated these materials to institutional archives, as a common practice for retrieving contextual information for these collections. Although valuable for archivists, these forms of getting to know the archive can sometimes go against disciplinary principles. In a historical context, for example, the knowledge gained through interviews can be incompatible with the nature of the archive itself. As Roger Odin notes, “home movies function less as representations than as index inviting the family to return to a past already lived. The home movie does not communicate. Instead it invites us to use a double process of remembering” (Odin, 2008, p.255). In doing so, the home movie’s memory function challenges the historical validity of data retrieved through methods such as interviews with home movie owners. The prevailing analysis of familial or documentary contexts in which these materials are embedded thus gives rise to reading modalities that keep home movies framed by fixed nomenclatures. They propagate a perceptual modality that foregrounds their utility as visual (film), testimonial (history) or relational (ethnography) materials. In doing so they encourage us to look at home movies as testimonies of truth from the past or as aesthetically appealing objects, without asking ourselves what underlies these assumptions or if there is more that we are able to detect underneath these interpretative frames. This is a reductive assessment of our way of looking at these archives that follows a pre-determined structure based on a learned vocabulary, rather than a perceptual modality that looks for patterns of recurrences and differentiation in these films, which derives from an instinctive and naturally inborn drive to see things. This ‘acquired’ or experience-based way of looking at archives is, in my view, also what Rick Prelinger points at when saying that even if artists and scholars are fascinated by this footage, they “don’t think very imaginatively about real ones (amateur archives)” (Prelinger, 2019, p. 6). According to Rick Prelinger, amateur archives are “microcosms of the worlds whose records they contain and organs through which power is expressed, but power and the labour maintaining it exist in covalent bondage” (Prelinger, 2019, p. 6). It becomes therefore impossible to approach the home movie archive with any intent of investigation without touching upon the labour and practice of collecting, preserving and disseminating it. The archive is never a clean record touched only by the vision of its creator.

It always bears the signs of those who have used and collected the footage, of the *life* of the archive itself. Through this perceptual lens, the home movie archive turns from a place of collection, preservation and access into what Rick Prelinger calls “an umbrella term for conceptual, philosophical, artistic, literary, historical or analytic constructs” (Prelinger, 2019, p.5), for which a predominant narrative simply becomes too narrow to be able to accommodate their semantic richness. What happens thus to the potential readings of the home movie which do not necessarily fall into these predominant narratives and lie buried beneath the surface of the home movie, hidden from most viewers or scholars? How can these readings enable us to tap deeper into a potential of the home movie that we are only beginning to realise (Aasman 2014, Cuevas 2013, McNamara et al. 2017, Zimmermann 1995)?

A good starting point is to try and re-frame the home movie as an umbrella concept that does not gravitate around the agency of the home moviemaker and his or her social context. This calls for a re-formulation of the home movie definition that is not built on agency and ownership. In my project, I define home movies as *imaginative filmic material, as doodles of the soul or invisible scripts, which contain material that is so magmatic and germinal to contribute to the renewal of the moving image*. Resembling instinctive drawings of reality rather than well-defined pieces of filmic material, this footage becomes similar to doodles or scripts. In fact, from a professional and filmic point of view, home movies come close to the idea of unfinished material that is still in the process of being developed into a full version of itself. Through their imaginative and unfinished nature, home movies are able to shift our contemporary expectations surrounding the moving image. In doing so, they position the audience outside of a high-resolution perspective of the world, where each coloured pixel melts in the perfect arrangement of digital formats. But most importantly, this definition conceptualises the home movie as footage that presents itself as different each time we open it, managing to amaze us by adopting a liminal position that is fully ascribable neither to the personal sphere – from where it can be decoded only by a small group of people who have been testimonies to its creation – nor to a specific disciplinary domain, where it can remain trapped in fixed nomenclatures. Not working through a predominant way of looking at the archive or narrative means that we do not try to fit our expectations into pre-existing interpretative frames. Moreover, defining the ways of going about this process becomes equally important, insofar as it sets a loose research frame allowing for experimentation.

In my project, I choose to engage with the home movie as a perceptual construct that can unleash creativity in how people look at, feel and engage with their social and cultural

environment. Instead of looking at classifications or nomenclatures, I look at their potential inventiveness, sensibility and disruptive creativity. This enables me to sympathise with these archives and to think *with* them, in the attempt to explore not *why* these repositories matter – which has been done extensively through existing scholarly research – but to explore *how* they matter, how they tacitly engage with the public in a process of thinking, feeling and discovery. In doing so, I adopt an approach to ways of seeing, understood as a perceptual gesture, that moves through intuition and thus constantly actualizes itself (Bergson, 1912). I will come back to the concept of actualization developed by Henri Bergson in the paragraphs below, where I will show why it helps me propose a new approach in reading the home movie in a digital context and how it frames my methodological approach. At this point, it suffices to signal that this specific approach to perception is one that helps me to expand the engagement with the home movie archive beyond habits, learned interpretations or past experience.

The hypothesis that I advance in my project is that we can foster a new way of looking at and thinking about these archives through practice, engagement and exhibition, i.e. through concrete actions that enable people to get closer to these films and uncover what lies hidden underneath their amateur appearance. In doing so, I adopt an arts-based practice – to which I dedicate an entire sub-section in the Methodology chapter – as a way of expanding our way of seeing beyond a disciplined manner and fostering new modalities of engaging with these collections, that while respecting their status of heritage objects, can go beyond conventional interpretative frames. The methodology thus experiments with creative exercises which encourage people to let go of habits, learned interpretations or past experiences that condition our interaction with these films. At the same time, it does not neglect their importance as counter-narratives to mainstream historical accounts, as amateur practices or as vernacular art forms. The title reflects this methodological approach by building on a personal taxonomy that constitutes a parallel to Kristen Daly’s proposed taxonomy, opening up Gilles Deleuze’s two cinema books (Daly, 2010). On a parallel note to Daly’s interactive-image (cinema 3.0), the title of my thesis, ‘Home movie 4.0’, references the 4<sup>th</sup> level of archival transformation that passes through three stages of development: the digital archive (2.0), the interactive archive (3.0) and the hybrid archive (4.0).

The project’s iterative process of creative exploration takes place through the lens of three disciplinary frames: film analysis, ethnographic investigation and participatory practice. Creative and artistic instruments do not only enrich these disciplinary methods; they push them into uncharted territories by experimenting with different notions of the concept of ‘seeing’

that these practices give rise to. Such a way of looking is highly bodily and sensitive as it goes beyond sight as a functionality of perception. This specific understanding of vision as being specifically tactile, haptic and bodily raised an increasing interest from media and film researchers during the past years. For example, both Laura Marks (Marks, 2000) and Jennifer Barker (Barker, 2009) advocate for a sensuous experience of film that goes beyond vision and manages to reverberate in the body. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's work instead, focuses on the fact that there is not only one path to aesthetic creation, but multiple ones which render aesthetics polycentric (Shohat et al 2008). While these studies mark a turn from sensation to synaesthesia in film, largely discussed by Tarja Laine and Wanda Stauven's work and taken up a subject of inquiry in a recent publication by Cambridge Scholars Publishing (Catanese et al, 2019), they also deepen the difference between what constitutes distinct forms of filmic material. Mainstream cinema resonates differently with the viewer than home movies do, insofar as its filmic structure concerns specific mechanisms through which filmic experience takes place. In this context, 'seeing through the body' not only shifts our understanding of how we perceive images (Jay, 1993 and Belting, 2011), it also confers a particular nuance to experience.

Seeing *with* the home movie archive, means seeing more, not from an obvious or representational perspective, but rather from a perspective we did not think we had access to before. This notion of seeing challenges the status of these films as repositories of the past fitting into pre-established categories and taxonomic frames and engages instead in readings of this material that foreground its aesthetic specificity and imaginative power. In doing so, it searches for novel ways to engage with the home movie archive, that are able to build on its characteristics of differentiation and creativity, and thus leads to the formulation of the project's main research question:

*How can we design a Sicilian home movie archive of the present, that is reflective of the value of the material it preserves and at the same time stands closer to the communities through which these cultural assets are able to live on?*

The core aim of the project is thus to explore how arts-based practice can transform theoretical frames of analysis surrounding these archives and thus foster new modalities of engagement with this footage, that enable communities to make a more direct use of these films. To this purpose, I work with a selected corpus of Sicilian home movie footage from Home Movies Bologna, Palermo Film Library and from YouTube. The Sicilian case represents a rich yet underexplored field that calls for further investigation. More than representing a unique object



to which the developed modalities apply, this corpus of footage operates as a key continuous case study across the thesis, that calls for specific approaches but at the same time opens up the methodology to the reading of other kinds of home movies, not only Sicilian ones.

# CHAPTER 2.

## Framing the Sicilian home movie archive

Back in 2013, while I was still a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Catania, I had my first encounter with what would become the subject of my PhD project: Sicilian home movies. As a workshop participant on a residency programme working with creative and interactive methods for cultural heritage, I took part in a collective exercise that screened Sicilian amateur footage. Those images that I was seeing for the first time in my life are still vivid in my memory: the bright colours of a volcanic landscape that groups of people explored during their walks, the playful moments enacted before the camera and the exciting moment of a volcanic eruption. My first encounter with Sicilian home movies and the personal explorations following it led me to formulate my research project. I decided to explore the specific heritage of the island, insofar as it is still hidden and full of surprises, as were those home movie scenes which I saw for the first time in 2013.

The worldwide home movie sector, although being quite a young area of research (Gutierrez, 2015), deals with a constantly growing corpus of material spread across private and institutional archives, turning a census of this material into an arduous endeavour. The relevance of this Sicilian heritage for the Italian research context is important, considering the cultural and historical context of the island.<sup>6</sup> Yet, at the same time, the Sicilian case belongs to a national scene that lacks a regional, local and national policy for the collection and preservation of this kind of audio-visual documents (Simoni, 2015). The establishment of institutional archives started in mainland Italy in 2002, which is relatively late compared to other European countries. More remote areas, such as the islands of Sicily and Sardinia, started even later to implement public campaigns for collecting and preserving this heritage. Nevertheless, in contrast to Sardinia, where a home movie initiative managed by researchers has enabled the collection and digitalization of more than 11.000 amateur reels, Sicily still lacks an integrated regional plan for the mass retrieval of home movie heritage.<sup>7</sup> Sicily's difficult position, in terms of policies and bureaucracy that renders collection difficult, is

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<sup>6</sup> Sicily is considered to be one of the cradles of culture. Owing 10% of the artistic and cultural heritage of Italy, 7 UNESCO world heritage sites and a long list of intangible heritage, Sicily is one of the richest islands in terms of history, culture and nature.

<sup>7</sup> I came to this conclusion after talking to archivists in Palermo and Bologna, who described to me the local context and after I carefully analysed the public websites of the Sicilian administration and the respective public archives: <http://www.cricd.it/pages.php?idpagina=435> , <http://www.siciliafilmcommission.org/it/>.

contrasted by evidence of interesting footage scattered across different institutions and private bodies, on the island and beyond. Public archives, private national archives, but also museums, cultural associations and community members all possess a share of this underexplored, yet interesting material. The *Palermo Film Library* and *Home Movies Bologna*, a private archive collecting only home movies at national level, are the two main institutions preserving Sicilian home movies. Other institutions preserve smaller collections. *Cineteca Milano* holds, for example, several Sicilian amateur movies from the 1950s and 1960s (still to be digitalized). The *Museo del Mare* in Palermo preserves local amateur material including home movies. The *Museo Mediterraneo di Antropologia Viva* managed by *Malastrada Film* offers online access to people interested in amateur material such as photography, diaries and amateur moving images.

Another part of home movie footage is in the hands of private collectors, institutions and non-profit organisations such as the *Archivio degli Iblei* and *Nos Archives*. *Archivio degli Iblei* is a crowdsourcing platform collecting the memories of local communities in Eastern Sicily through photographs, videos and interviews. The second one is a digital archive of amateur material established in 2010 that stores more than 13.000 digitalised reels shot between 1922 and 1984 with a duration of around 300 minutes. The situation becomes even more complex when considering privately held footage, as no study is available on Sicilian families producing home movies between the 1920s, when amateur technology (16mm, 8mm) was released, and late 1970s, when these films started being replaced by video. The Internet offers clues about private ownership of this footage through channels such as YouTube, Blogs, digital articles or other private Websites. As part of my project, I undertook some desk research on this topic and was able to identify different local initiatives about which I will speak in the next paragraphs. Nevertheless, the collection of new material is not the aim of my project and, in terms of the extent of research that is necessary to uncover ownership of this material, it would represent another self-standing project. To this end, I did not undertake very in-depth research on this topic, except for what I will present in the following paragraphs. What my desk research brought to the fore is a mix of physical and digital distribution channels and grassroots projects working with this kind of footage, about which I will speak in the following sections. This reveals the Sicilian home movie scene to be one suspended between the domains of the private and public, physical and digital and historical and creative.

Although providing challenges in terms of retrieval of material, the Sicilian case is an interesting one, insofar as it offers original material that has been little researched by scholars

and artists. My visits at the Film archive in Palermo and at National Amateur Film Archive in Bologna uncovered interesting material – both in terms of originality of the content depicted and camera use, as also in terms of the presence of very old material dating back to the 1930s – that few researchers studied and even fewer artists reused in their work. For my project, I selected a corpus of footage that is representative of this context, as it comes from three sources: the Palermo Film Library, the Home Movies Bologna and a collection of material that I identified on YouTube, conducting an online search using specific keywords. The first two choices are obvious in terms of value and amount of Sicilian records stored.

The Palermo Film Library holds one of the broadest, publicly available Sicilian home movie collections. By 2010, the archive had collected home movies from around 20 families, with a total duration of around 300 minutes. The material is heterogeneous, presenting different aspects of everyday life: from domestic chores, leisure activities, sport activities, to local traditions and celebratory events (weddings, baptisms, birthdays, local festivities and other public gatherings). The most historically valuable material available was shot during the 1960s by a Sicilian migrant to the United States and depicts one of President Kennedy's last public speeches before his assassination. The institution uses an integrated taxonomy for cataloguing its collections. Each reel has two attached files: a technical one with the name of the author, reel format, date, subject and state of preservation and a descriptive one with a brief outline of the content, historical information connected to the author and the characters appearing in the footage. The collection of this material started in late 2008 and was extended by the province of Palermo to most of the Sicilian territory, through cooperation with public bodies and cultural organisations across the region, where home movie owners could hand in their material. Digitalization was offered as a free service. Due to the lack of funds, the call for collecting home movies was soon abandoned. Nevertheless, the Palermo Film Library continues to engage in the promotion of preserved footage by offering free on-site access to the footage and encouraging the reuse of its resources mainly for creative purposes, as it declares on its institutional webpage.<sup>8</sup>

Home Movies Bologna holds a collection of Sicilian home movies with a length of around 200 minutes (8mm, 16mm, super8), according to the estimations of the archivists working in the archive. The footage is mainly composed of footage depicting Sicily as a travel destination. More than 30 minutes of footage is dedicated to the representation of Mount Etna as an important holiday destination. The footage has a homogenous, ritualistic character,

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<sup>8</sup> Palermo Film Library: <http://cricd.it/pages.php?idpagina=435>.

depicting reoccurring themes and places connected to Sicily as a tourist destination: seaside, road trips and places of historical importance. The only footage that does not portray these characteristics is represented by images capturing the desolate Sicilian landscape of the city of Gibellina in the aftermath of the 1986 earthquake (Terremoto del Belice). The institution preserves footage according to FIAF cataloguing systems, using international standards for the description of archives (Isad G/Isaar CPF). This generates a cataloguing system based on criteria such as ownership and contextual information. As a result, the available material is identified through the family name of its owner, which is added to the Italian word ‘fondo’, in order to identify which material belongs to which family. Other criteria for preserving material is represented by contextual information such as the year of filming, the technology used (8mm, 16mm, super8) and descriptive background information, mostly provided by owners themselves (e.g. description of subject and filming occasion). The oldest home movies belong to the Fondo La Colla (Palermo area) and Fondo Damiata, the first one having some of the oldest images available (around 1930s) and the second belonging to a prestigious Sicilian family. The archive in Bologna remains largely unexplored due to the wealth of stored material and the difficult process of digitalisation of collections. Recently Home Movie Bologna has launched an online platform through which the public can digitally access some of their home movie collections.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to this institutional footage, I decided to include in my analysis footage retrieved from YouTube. This material significantly improves, in my personal view, the understanding of the Sicilian case and therefore requires further consideration. Online platforms such as YouTube are very much contested spaces for knowledge production and memory sharing, especially in relation to practices of public history and the limits of historical representation (Balint, 2014). They are being increasingly used as platforms for identity-sharing and community building, leading to the formation of what Rick Prelinger calls “personal, independent, and community collections (that) enable research and access in ways that more traditionally organized institutions cannot” (Prelinger, 2019, p.36). Although lacking the scientific framework belonging to institutional archives and through the increase of distributed collecting and the emergence of other forms of collecting, YouTube is increasingly used as a platform for publishing home movies, as evidenced by my exploration. Considering that the island lacks a consistent strategy for the retrieval of this material and that existing

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<sup>9</sup> Access to the repositories of the Home Movie Bologna archive can be found here: <https://ms-emilia-romagna.homemovies.it/it/search/> and <http://ms-italia.homemovies.it/it/search/>.

footage in archives is not easy to access because of bureaucratic and copyright issues, the online domain becomes an alternative channel of distribution.

I initiated my research of these films on YouTube partly driven by the difficulties in negotiating the terms of my research with institutional archives and partly by my curiosity to further investigate this area after I found the first online material. Using keywords such as ‘super8mm Sicilia’, ‘Film di famiglia siciliano’, ‘memorie super8 Sicilia’ or combinations thereof, I was able to identify 567 minutes of relevant footage. This material belongs predominantly to five home movie owners, all of whom are Italian migrants to the North of Italy and the United States. These findings prove the use of YouTube as a tool for memory sharing and to some extent the re-appropriation of one’s own roots and cultural identity. Yet, as a virtual container of memories often connected to a nostalgic commemoration of the past, YouTube lacks the organic organisational construct of both institutionalised archives and more structured community projects and therefore becomes hard to navigate. What, in fact, YouTube enabled me to do has been to improvise the use of keywords and to follow clues or YouTube’s automatic suggestions to uncover further material of interest. I am nevertheless aware that my research represents only the beginning of a different explorative direction into a vast amount of material that is most probably out there, but hard to retrieve, due to the lack of a consistent search methodology.

Notwithstanding this, my analysis of user profiles and uploaded material indicates that the use of YouTube as a random collector of memories (Aasman, 2019) and an unstable archive (Thornton, 2017 and McKernan, 2016), although not profoundly transforming the approach to the home movie archive, facilitates a less scientifically constrained engagement that offers alternative interpretations and new creative uses of this material (Gibbons, 2015 and Shand et al., 2013). An example thereof is the use of comments on YouTube, through which different users can interact with people posting this kind of material. In several cases in my research, I identified several user comments that asked for permission to reuse posted material for creative purposes. Such processes encourage, through the circulation of and the online engagement with such films, the formulation of independent artistic and creative projects. They can also lead to the creation of communities of interest around these archives (people subscribe to these channels and follow them) and slowly give rise to participatory and Do-It-Yourself projects. These projects represent creative reworkings and remixes of these films by community members. Editing, adding sound or using shots as collages for new creative works, these forms of manipulation take the making of this heritage out of the heritage industry and back into the

community context where people are doing, feeling, creating, and experiencing the world in their own ways (Sheffield, 2017). In fact, through channels such as YouTube and other social media platforms, grassroots projects gain momentum. This is the case of the *Archivio degli Iblei* project mentioned before, or the workshops organised in Palermo by the *Museo del Mare* in collaboration with the artist Novella Olliana that use archive images to reflect on social aspects of space. These projects prove the important power of the digital in terms of new organisational forms but also as alternative platforms for the dissemination and sharing of these initiatives. Although my approach of YouTube as an alternative repository of Sicilian home movies is far from being scientifically grounded, it has offered me the possibility to assess the role of these social media channels to “encourage non-traditional users to become involved with the archive” (Slater, 2017, p.354). I therefore decided to include the footage retrieved from YouTube in my project, insofar as it brings the Sicilian home movie archive closer to a public that can make direct use of it by engaging with the material in a much more exploratory way than traditional research. This experimental approach is rooted in Henri Bergson’s concept of actualization and forms the subject of the next chapter.

# CHAPTER 3.

## A methodological approach to actualizing the archive

Any form of engagement with the home movie archive entails a perceptual activity. Whether we are scholars exploring this material in our work, artists creatively transforming this footage, or people browsing through these images from the past - virtually or through institutional archives - the first thing we do is open and look at this material. When we do so, some of the first things that we ask ourselves is who the people in these films are and what are they doing. These questions ask for contextual information that helps us to better frame the *who*, *what* and *how* in these films, without which our understanding of what is going on in these images appears incomplete. At the same time, this sort of information facilitates the construction of social meaning through secondary sources such as interviews. When referring to the social meaning, or “sociality of the home movie” (Guerra, 2011, p.51), Michele Guerra talks about a semiotic space that is shared among few people, normally those belonging to the close community of the family. Even if we can use a deductive process to decode the broader social context of these films, we still need further information in order to make sense of some gestures or events depicted in these images. To this end, institutional archives gather as much contextual information as possible, in order to offer to the public a perspective that is as complete as possible. Without this background data, a viewer who does not belong to the same social context as the home movie maker, can find it difficult to decode those layers of meaning that are more nuanced and personal. By providing contextual information, we give rise to a reading of the home movie that proceeds from the ‘outside’ to the ‘inside’.

What if, instead of looking externally for supporting evidence for what is being represented in these films, we look for it internally, in the image itself? An attempt to go in this direction has been already undertaken by Daniele Wecker, who explored in her PhD project the way in which different filmic modes form the meaning of the home movie. In her project, she adopted a phenomenological approach that explored the motives and film languages which shape amateur universes through a corpus of more than sixty hours of home movies from archives in Luxembourg. By watching this material and making notes on film style and content, Daniele Wecker uncovered a “multitude of exhaustive information that crystallized into various identifiable patterns, if by no means homogenous ones” (Wecker, 2018, p. 217). As she affirms in her thesis, there is, “for lack of better expression, something more” into these



films, a “shadowy feeling of an interpretative surplus that never quite bounds to whatever hypothesis we impose upon them” (Wecker, 2018, p.224).

While this is an interesting approach that tries to capture the unique nature of these materials through specific filmic modes, what it proposes is a codification of meaning at the level of language, by setting up interpretative frames. Looking at the home movie through these frames or *Gestalten*,<sup>10</sup> which according to Wecker refer to the oscillations that structure sight, is interesting, insofar as it traces the instinctive and more direct way to engage with films. At the same time, this interpretative surplus is a result of a much more complex reality that can only partly be expressed verbally. While we seek for visual patterns of recurrence and differentiation in these images, we become also aware that language alone cannot account for our experience thereof. If we take, for example, the variety of sensations that these images give rise to, how can we put them into words so that they describe exactly what we feel? According to John Koenig, there are some powerful emotions for which there are currently no words. His *Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*<sup>11</sup> is a compilation of neologisms naming these emotions and adding to each entry an explanatory video. This format is a clear indication of the fact that our perceptual apparatus is too complex to be captured by language, while at the same time being in constant flux, passing from one state to the other. As Bergson says “we must not confound the data of the senses, which perceive the movement, with the artifice of the mind, which recomposes it. The senses, left to themselves, present to us the real movement, between two real halts, as a solid and undivided whole” (Bergson, 1896 p.428). What was transformed or lost through this process of crystallization of our impressions into language? At this point, it is difficult to make sense of this question insofar as we would need to recur to speech to answer it. In this respect, Bergson warns us of a dominant use of language that can manipulate, however intelligently and rationally used, already available concepts and expressions. Language, like the home movie, is never a clean record; it always bears the faint marks of our sensory perceptions and impressions just like the home movie bears the marks of the people who dealt with it (archivists, artists, scholars etc). Moreover, language as a reflection of what we come to know about the home movie through sight can turn more problematic, becoming even more selective and limiting of the way we define the archive. Bergson is indeed clear about the fact that sight, even more than touch, can provide a world of “static objects” (Bergson,

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<sup>10</sup> Gestalt theorists were the first psychologists to systematically study perceptual organisation in Germany. Among ‘Gestaltists’ we can count: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Ernst Mach, Christian von Ehrenfels, Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Köhler, Kurt Koffka, and Kurt Lewin. A ‘Gestalt’ refers to a perceptual figure or appearance as it is represented momentarily in the visual field.

<sup>11</sup> More information on the project can be found here: <https://www.dictionaryofobscuresorrows.com>

1912, p. 185-186). Continuing to define the home movie through our ability to express through language what we see in them means returning to the same pre-determined frame of analysis used by disciplinary thinking. This realisation calls for more creative methods able to open language to the flow of sensations, mnemonic processes and affective gestures emerging through a model of perception in which, as Bergson affirms, “things participate in the nature of our perception” (Bergson, 1896, p.237).

Bergson’s model of perception expands our cognitive capacity, rendering it a fluid concept, a bodily and sensible position from which to capture experience holistically. This is a way of seeing in movement, constantly actualizing reality, in order to attune to the dynamics of experience. As such, it can open our perception of the archive to more sensuous and creative ways of conceptualising it. Referred to as a constant movement and formation of reality that takes place through *difference* and *creation*, the idea of ‘actualization’ is core to establishing how the project deals with the reading of the Sicilian home movie archive, and implicitly, the archive as a perceptual experience. Derived from Bergson’s theory of perception, actualization relies on the mechanism which progresses from the appearance of an idea in pure perception, similar to a mental picture or an impression, referred to as the ‘dynamic scheme’, to a synthesis and concretization of the idea on the plain of consciousness, referred to as ‘the image’ (Bergson, 1911, p.55). S. Maras takes Bergson’s reading of actualization further to prove its importance for the renewal of the notion of sight by expanding it beyond perceptual boundaries (Maras, 1998). Through actualization – the passage from ‘scheme’ to ‘image’, i.e. from the virtual state of the dynamic scheme to the actual image – we perform a gesture of selection from the indefinite perceptual possibilities that we have available (Bergson, 1896, p.37). This opens up a horizon of endless perceptual possibilities of the home movie archive that can be orchestrated based on the organisation of the perceptual process. In my project, I use Bergson’s concept of actualization both at conceptual level – to reframe our understanding of the archive at perceptual level – and at a practical level – to think about praxis as hands-on creative and imaginative activities that impact theoretical thinking and even transform its methodological foundation. Both levels have deep implications for my methodological approach. I will start by exploring the conceptual implications of actualization for the reading of my corpus of Sicilian home movies, and then look at those formats of practice which can sustain this conceptual reframing.

### 3.1 Practicing actualizations of the home movie

Bergson's model of actualization foregrounds a perceptual process in constant movement; one that pays attention to the shifts in perception in order to grasp reality holistically. This dynamic and expanded perceptual capacity that sees 'more' than the simple appearance of things, is more suitable to capture that surplus of meaning, that 'something more' in the home movie which Daniele Wecker talks about (Wecker, 2018, p.224). It does so by going beyond the utility and habit of vision, which keeps us stuck in interpretative frames and perpetuates the same modality of looking at things. This is a perceptual model that does not *represent* things but *presents* them, reveals them as they are. In fact, Bergson describes representation as a reductionist process. Through representation, the object of our perception shifts from the image as 'being in itself' to the image as 'being for me' (Bergson, 1896, p.38); in doing so, it reduces this object to its mere appearance. The image of a perceptual object is thus for Bergson less than the thing in itself – the existence of the object independently of me perceiving it or not – but more than the representation thereof. This involves an act of subtraction:

Representation is a diminution of the image; the transition from image to pure perception is discernment in the etymological sense of the word, a slicing up or a selection. (Bergson, 1896, p. 38)

While this specific approach falls into the broader debate around problematisations of representations in film theory, what it presents is a distinct position in relation to the indexicality of the image. Indexicality, understood as an essential quality of a photography or film has become under the influencing theories of Charles Sanders Peirce and André Bazin a guarantee of truthfulness that creates a strong link between the cinematic/photographic image and the real. Bergson's approach can in fact be singled out from both Bazin's realist notions of cinema, for whom the photographic image *is* the object itself (Bazin, 1960) and from Charles Sanders Peirce for whom the index designates those signs that evidence an existential relation to the things they signify (Peirce, 1955). By further problematizing the link between the image and its representation, Bergson makes space for the case in which an image is not a clear index to something visually given. In doing so, he draws into discussion the para-index (Seung-hoon Jeong, 2011), or that case in which the image cannot reach its indexical fullness, and therefore indicates its unrepresentable origin or immanence.

The relevance of the para-indexicality of the image has a particular importance for the home movie image, a type of cinematic format whose primary aim is not to reveal or represent, but

to 'exist'. Through this process, the home movie becomes other than a fragment of memory, a piece of history, a sentimental object or any other type of object that fits our capacity of representation. It presents a surplus that through Bergson's notion of representation as a para-indexical process could potentially enable us to expand our way of looking at the home movie archive. Could we capture that surplus of meaning noted by Wecker, that does not simply reduce these films to their appearance, but reveals them as they are for the beholder? Which tools do we need to support such an expanded notion of sight? To overcome this "necessary poverty of representation" (Bergson, 1896, p. 38), Bergson introduces the notion of the body as a privileged position or an attitude that defines perception according to the body's interest. In the first chapter of *Matter and Memory* (1896), Bergson talks about the basics of imagology, explaining how the existence of a perceptual background that returns to the body only what interests the latter, positions the body in a privileged position compared to other objects:

To the degree that my horizon widens, the images, which surround me seem to be painted upon a more uniform background and become to me more indifferent. The more I narrow this horizon, the more the objects, which it circumscribes, space themselves out distinctly according to the greater or lesser ease with which my body can touch and move them. They send back [renvoient, "return"], then, to my body, as would a mirror, its eventual influence; they take rank in an order corresponding to the growing or decreasing powers of my body. The objects, which surround my body, reflect its possible action upon them. (Bergson 1896, p. 56)

Through its privileged position, the body becomes the centre of perception; a body that is sensible and intuitive and able to grasp even the slightest inflections of perceptual reality. The body is also central in the home movie universe. There are bodies posing in front of the camera: moving, dancing, standing etc. There are bodies, that we can get a feel of, also behind the camera. The bouncing movement of the camera indicates the presence of the filmmaker standing behind the lens. There are then fleeing bodies, that we can grasp only for an instant, as they pass in front of the lens, and half-bodies, that we can partly apprehend, as they stand too close to the camera. Despite its recurring presence in the home movie universe, we tend to look at the body through disciplinary frames of analysis. These are built on cultural or disciplinary thinking relying on a macroperceptual approach, rather than being focused on bodily perception, which refers to a microperceptual approach. Don Ihde explains the main difference between microperception and macroperception as follows:

What is usually taken as sensory perception (what is immediate focused bodily in actual seeing, hearing, etc.), I shall call microperception. But there is also that what might be called cultural, or hermeneutic, perception, which I shall call macroperception. Both belong equally to the lifeworld. And both dimensions of perception are closely linked and intertwined. (Ihde, 2002, p. 29)

Taking as an example the stylistic analysis of the home movie, we become aware of the dominating use of macroperception to investigate these films. This analysis has traditionally revolved around the ‘home mode’ (Chalfen, 1987) – a homemade style of recording, devoid of a methodically and technically researched approach. Often referred to as ‘naïve cinema’ (Chalfen, 1987), the home movie reveals a peculiar way of looking at the world that is neither filtered by the technical mastery of the medium, nor subject to a predefined narrative structure. Its freedom consists in the same lack of rules that rendered it naïve.

In order to break free from the analytic and taxonomic constraints that the home mode calls for, we need to move away from a definition of film style as technical knowledge to a definition in which the relationship of the moviemaker to the camera, that is typical of non-formalized practices, stands out (Cavallotti, 2019). According to Diego Cavallotti, non-formalised practices are a technically non-informed way of approaching the film medium. Contrary to semi-professional or professional filmmakers, the majority of home moviemakers do not possess a deep technical knowledge of the medium.<sup>12</sup> This is why their approach to filmmaking is an informal rather than a formal one.

Paying attention to the film style, not as a home mode, but as a gesture that is personal and reflexive, we shift attention from a macroperception of the body – that is rather problematic, insofar as we have to analyse the technical means of something that is devoid of technical rules – to a microperception of the body – that looks at the uniqueness of the movie through the film style understood as the synthesis of bodily gestures. In addition, passing from the analysis of a modality to one of practice foregrounds a movement from a fixed and static concept (being) to one that is fluid and gestural (becoming).

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<sup>12</sup> Although many moviemakers turned from photography to film, they rarely made it to the level of professional filmmaking (Zimmerman, 1995). While it is not uncommon for a professional filmmaker to shoot his private home movies, these images rarely possess the specific amateur feel. Michael Chapman speaks about this reality when he narrates an episode from the set of *Raging Bull* (1980) directed by Martin Scorsese, where professional filmmakers tried, but could not properly shoot the home movie scenes required for the film. He assigns this incapacity to the fact that professionals are conditioned by technical knowledge that can only mimic but not provide the feel of authentic home movie scenes. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0mSd35kcMo>.

The analysis of the home movie style as a cinematic gesture that passes through ‘the body’ as an expressive form does not deploy ready-made analytic frames such as technical film language but uses instead creative intuition as a guiding principle. The point of departure for methods able to reveal these bodily movements, are elements of *difference* and *creativity* in the home movie images. What the audience turns its attention to, is not how close-ups or the composition of scenes are used to build an aesthetically informed style, but how the camera follows the body movements and confers upon the images a specific rhythm and intensity.

A stylistic analysis of the home movie moving through the lens of actualization opens up ‘ways of seeing’ towards a bodily and sensitive and therefore microperceptual modality. This is a perceptual process that re-frames the home movie’s understanding beyond disciplinary frames or conventions and gives rise to a definition of the home movie that is fluid and open enough, to allow for impressions to be evoked rather than firmly stated. My definition of the home movie used in the project looks at these films as work-in-progress, as cultural assets that are constantly renewed each time that we open them; in doing so they allow for sight to constantly actualize the levels of meaning of the image. In the following paragraph I will focus on hands-on practices and methods that can align with this new way of looking at these archives.

### 3.2 Actualizing home movie practices

The previous section explored how, under the influence of actualization, perception turns into a sensible form of intuition that calls for an active participation of the body in the perceptual process. As such, ‘seeing with the body’ turns out to be not only conceptually different from a more utilitarian and conventional way of seeing, but also different in practical terms: those aspects that deal with activating an embodied and thus gestural capacity of the perceptual process. In this light, the ‘gestural in seeing’ and the gestural understood as the practical process of managing or handling home movie archives, find a common denominator in the concept of actualization. In the following, I explore how hands-on practices and approaches can influence theoretical thinking in the archival context, as a result of an expanded understanding of the notion of sight.

Praxis, in the home movie sector, refers to the activity of collecting or managing home movies (archival practice) and to that of creative reuse of this footage (reuse practice).<sup>13</sup> Both activities have been part of the history of the home movie. Since the passage of this type of footage from the private to the public domain, the work of archivists has been essential to ensuring the qualitative management and safeguarding of collections. Archivists have been often seen as gatekeepers of archival knowledge. This role could be looked upon as a passive one, when thinking of safeguarding in terms of ‘protecting’ and storing these reels instead of ensuring an active exposure to and use for the public. Yet archivists’ work is anything but passive. Archivists are those who deal with boxes of reels, their classification, restoration and cataloguing, who grapple with the complex technologies of media including all the screens and servers required for the management of records. Their activity implies a concrete level of selection, filtering, display and representation of the archive, in line with disciplinary taxonomies and nomenclatures. As these figures strive towards arranging the footage in collections and presenting it in a certain way, they shape the perceptual possibilities of the home movie archive. Moreover, with the rise of the Internet, as the boundaries between professional roles in the archival field became more blurred, the role of the archivist has extended from gatekeeper to ‘curator’ of knowledge, dealing increasingly with new ways to present this material to the public in an attractive and interactive format. As archivists needed to deal increasingly with aspects such as digitalisation formats and the funding required to digitalise such a daunting mass of materials (Swanson, 2012) and make it available online, this shift became obvious. As Rick Prelinger observes: “archival work and creative practices have converged, which isn’t to say artists resemble archivists, rather, archivists are the new artists” (Prelinger, 2019, p. 3). What Prelinger draws attention to is the novel artistic tasks that archivists need to take up in the digital age. These tasks contribute to a renewed perception of the role of the archivist as a more open and fluid professional category.

This is a similar situation to artists who reuse this footage creatively, as part of new works of art such as documentaries or interactive works. The American experimental

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<sup>13</sup> The creative reuse of home movies in novel works is based on the remix culture. The culture of remix is, according to de Certeau, a society that allows and encourages derivative works by combining or editing existing materials to generate new products. It refers to the practice of remix that is a ‘recycling technique’ (de Certeau, 2001) developed as a result of the passage from a read-only culture, where we could only view online audio-visual products, to a ‘read-write culture’ where we can reuse some images and footage from the Internet, supported by laws such as Creative Commons and Best practices in fair use. Yet the remix culture is the result of a much longer trend of reusing archival material. Starting with Soviet cinema and passing to found footage practices and experimental cinema, home movie archives have been the objects of new artistic works for decades. Through this trend, home movies are practically extracted from their original context and re-contextualized, acquiring a different meaning.

filmmaker Bill Morrison, whose work combines rare archival material set to contemporary music, can be considered an archivist. Fascinated with decaying film archives, Bill Morrison has a distinctive approach to this material through interventions that “both respect and challenge the sanctity of their sources and question orthodox uses of these materials” (Popple, 2018). Other artists such as Ken Jacobs push technology to the edge, in order to make audiences reflect on notions of politics, gender, race and film. His exploitation of mechanical and visual intersections gave rise to over 45 films. *Tom Tom the Piper’s Son* (1970) is maybe the first case of home movie reuse and one of the best examples of Jacob’s interest in the mechanical, chemical and spatio-temporal foundations of filmic experience. Stan Brakhage films also deal with the chemical fascination of the reel. In fact, many of his works (*Anticipation of the Night-1955*, *Anticipation of the Night-1958*, *Window Water Baby Moving-1959*) experiment with hand-painted film, scratches into the film emulsion and collage methods. Because these films are mostly silent movies, they resemble a poetic format that offer a reflection on the notion of visual experience. Another important avantgarde artist, Jonas Mekas re-proposes the aesthetics of home movies into his own personal style. His two films, *Walden* (1969) and *As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally, I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty* (2000), stitch together by means of a monotone narration a sequence of non-linear images and home movies scenes. On the one hand, other filmmakers explore historical aspects or more personal themes through the reuse of home movies. Italian filmmaker Alina Marazzi, for example, takes as a point of departure her family’s material to build a filmic universe that deals with serious social and personal challenges in works such as *For One More Hour With You* (2002) or *We also want roses* (2007). These films explore the relation between film and cultural identity through an analysis conducted using a feminist lens. Her films interrogate, through the specific reuse of archival footage, the role of such media as technologies of memory. For the Hungarian filmmaker Peter Forgács, on the other hand, home movies turn into methods for exploring history from a visual perspective. *Meanwhile Somewhere* (1994), for example, investigates the Europe’s history between 1930 and 1960, deploying home movies as micro-histories.

Whether used to deal with family history and cultural identity or as experimental ground for film practices and technological development (see the work of Brakhage, Mekas and Jacobs), these films prove their great capacity not only to fit into new imaginaries and artistic practices, but also to expand our perceptual universe. As Jamie Baron rightfully notes: “the use of home movies expands the territory that we regard as historical, enabling personal micronarratives to emerge as a significant element of our understanding of past events” (Baron,



2014, p.38). As such, home movies do not only enable us to understand history better, but also to reframe different aspects of our lives, from the most private ones, to the social, cultural and aesthetic ones. The different techniques and approaches of these filmmakers show how such creative uses of the archive unfold a hidden universe of the home movie, that makes us look at it with different eyes. Creative practice has the ability, as Ken Jacobs says, to actualize our way of looking at these films, to give rise to new perceptual possibilities:

Eisenstein said that the power of film was to be found between shots. Peter Kubelka seeks it between film frames. I want to get between the eyes, contest the separate halves of the brain. A whole new play of appearances is possible here. (Jacobs, 2020)

In fact, a creative way of looking at these films has accompanied the history of experimental film, of which the home movie has been an integral part. Early Soviet cinema, for example, not only contributed to montage and aesthetic film theory, but also paved the way for the reuse of archival footage (Hagener, 2005). To develop the Kuleshov Effect, a method of montage that derived meaning from two sequential shots rather than from a single shot in isolation, Russian director and filmmaker Lev Kuleshov filmed the emotionless face of actor Ivan Mozzhukhin and juxtaposed it with clips of archival footage depicting a variety of objects. Such experiments with archival footage led to theorising found footage film, a genre that reuses archival footage of unidentified origins to give rise to new films or artistic productions (Beauvais 2018, Brenez 2000, Russell 1999 and Wees 1993). Praxis has therefore been indicative of the strategies and tendencies that have accompanied and interfered with disciplinary thinking, sometimes offering an alternative and other times a complementary perspective on how scholars have looked at home movies and film archives in general.

As the archival field became more complex, with the impact of digitalisation and the rise of new platforms and grassroots projects, disciplinary thinking started calling for new tools and methods able to theorise these new forms of engagement with the home movie. An exemplary case is the rise of ‘public history’, a relatively new area of study and methodological tendency (Noiret, 2017), which recovers historical memory *with* and *for* the public by combining different theoretical strands. Archival material and other testimonies retrieved through the methods of public history become core to its object of study. Home movies, as records that safeguard the private memory of communities also find a central place in this methodological approach. By drawing attention to the everyday life of communities, through gestures that go beyond a conventional historical significance to include affective, mnemonic

and aesthetic registers of meaning, home movies introduce in disciplinary thinking elements of profound transformation. The contemporary nexus between praxis and disciplinary thinking surrounding the home movie sector that gave rise to new methodological approaches and disciplines, such as those used in the frame of public history, can be therefore thought of as a complex process of actualization of the archive, on a level that is practical and theoretical at the same time. In the case of public history, the practice of home movie making shifted the methodological approaches of history, leading to the formulation of new disciplinary thinking and a manner of operating that is positioned at the intersection of disciplinary methods and community practice. Public history thus becomes a good example of how creative and imaginative practices can influence methodology and give rise to new areas of research at the intersection of traditional disciplines and new approaches.

‘Actualizing practices’ and ‘practicing actualizations’ of the Sicilian home movie archive become two sides of the same coin, deriving from a form of perceptual attention or way of seeing that favours the emergence of visual experience, bodily expressions and affective impressions that are indicative of the ‘other’, of the ‘different’ and the ‘same’ in the home movie. In doing so, actualization assists us in conceiving of this footage as a process of *becoming* rather than one of *being*, keeping interpretation open to multiple registers of knowledge. It enables us to step beyond binary thinking – the archive seen either as conceptual space or as an object for practical use – in order to tap deeper into the potentialities and resonances that the home movie sector can find in relation to its public. This perspective strengthens the imaginative and fluid nature of the Sicilian home movie. It also gives rise to a digital archival structure enabled by a way of seeing that dilates and is transformed within creative endeavours (Bergson, 1911, p.148). As such, actualization facilitates the emergence of a research frame that does not insist on exploring an “archive representing the already gone, but one that exhibits a renewal of life, that thickens and deepens time beyond the present” (Deger, 2017, p.318) and explores new visions thereof. In the following section, I will use a practical example from the Sicilian home movie archive to explore the potential of creative practice to determine a more flexible and sensible form of experiencing the archive.

### 3.3 From imagination to imaginative methodologies

An extended concept of perception is one that imagines new ways of seeing, transformed by other potential perceptual modalities. In this respect, this novel modality embodies the

threshold of otherness, insofar as it constantly trespasses the limit between *inside* and *outside*, managing to mix things which do not fall in the study of perception with those that do so. In my project, transformation takes place through the introduction of arts-based methods into disciplinary thinking. Artistic practice such as drawing, writing and recording become core components of my methodology, enabling me to expand the understanding of the Sicilian archive beyond disciplinary frames offered by film analysis, ethnographic field research and co-design practices. Through these imaginative practices, I aim to explore how these frames, that are usually deployed in the investigation of the Sicilian home movie archive, can shift towards new approaches and determine novel reading modalities of these films, giving rise to an archive *of* and *for* the future. To understand better how actualization and, implicitly, an expanded concept of perception facilitates this transformation and shapes the methodological approach of my project, I will use the corpus of footage belonging to the Liga family, one of the five families posting on YouTube. The footage can be watched at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eehGtjenPgc>.

Film analysis is a recurrent tool used in the exploration of filmic material, that identifies semiotic, technical or cultural layers of meaning (Bateman et al., 2012). In the case of the home movie, film analysis can become challenging, insofar as these films lack a narrative structure and a *mise-en-scene* which are normally core components of film analysis. The question that arises at this point is: how can we imagine an analytic format that can capture the intrinsic meaning of these films through less conventional elements? Arts can provide the suitable transformative approach to the analysis of the home movie, insofar as they are invested with the imaginative and creative sensibility able to ‘move’ language towards a more fluid and reflexive direction. By transforming language in a creative way, the arts contribute to imagining new elements to include in the film analysis or to transform existing ones. In the case of the Liga family’s footage, I used imaginative writing, in the first instance, to create a different kind of presentation of the narrative structure of these films. My use of the concept of imaginative writing derives from the forms of enquiry of imaginative ethnography<sup>14</sup> that includes experimental methods such as new ethnographic writing, multisensory, multimedia and multimodal storytelling. Imaginative ethnography adds imaginative thinking and methods that elicit this form of thinking to fieldwork. Among these methods, imaginative writing is considered to be an “undisciplined form of writing” that follows the free flow of consciousness,

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<sup>14</sup> More details about this relatively new field of research can be found at the following link: <https://imaginative-ethnography.com>. I will deal with imaginative ethnography in greater depth in the chapter exploring an embodied modality of reading of the archive.

initiating dialogue in order to allow as Cvetkovich (as cited in Elliott, 2016) noted “for speculative thinking, unfinished thoughts and imagination to enter our writing” (p.34). Compared to automatic writing, which is an unconscious exercise, imaginative writing does not suppress logical thinking but opens it to the influence of sensations. These sensations insinuate themselves into our writing, giving rise to forms of expression that are neither fully subjective nor fully objective, but aim at offering us a glimpse of more sensible registers of knowledge.

I deploy this method in my project as a writing exercise that offers an alternative to the narrative analysis of these films. Inside film analysis, elements such as plot structure, character motivations and theme are core analytical elements. In the case of home movies, this is missing. Archiving practices make up for this lack through the identification of descriptive elements of these films, such as the location, time and people who appear in these images. Although this information offers important clues, it does not evidence the sensuous and affective elements through which the home movie operates. In fact, we cannot read the emotions of the filmmaker from the name of people appearing in the images or from the locations of the shootings. We can read them from the way he or she moves the camera, from the choice and framing of subjects and landscape, from the more subtle and implicit details embedded in these images. In my view, writing deployed as an imaginative practice, represents a suitable tool for uncovering these aspects of the home movie, as it presents the home movie under a different light. By using language in a metaphorical way, this form of writing uncovers the affective and emotional component of the home movie and can therefore be looked at as a form of investigation able to tap into different knowledge registers of the archive. The following section is a fragment of imaginative writing that I produced in relation to the Liga family’s footage:

The landscape smells of orange blossoms, of the sea, of fennel fields, of home ... when one returns from the journey, everything smells more intensely, as if it had accumulated the energy of a lost time. Everything becomes a landscape that needs to be captured: parties, walks, picnics, the time spent together. Even faces become landscapes under the gaze of the camera. In their alignments lies a forgotten familiarity, a past time that is always present in the heart. Just like trees, flowers and grass form the outline of the landscape, faces on celluloid trace the outline of a distant space-time universe. These faces are transformed into archetypes of a world suspended between past and future.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Extract from the imaginative writing practice of my PhD project.

In this example, imaginative writing becomes a way of feeling and thinking *with* the home movie, instead of thinking *about* it. To think *with* the home movie image means paying attention to sensations, tactility and feelings not as consequences of cognitive gestures or as reactions to outside stimuli, but rather as a process of constant interaction with our object of perception. We do not simply reminisce about the smell of orange blossom, the sea and the fennel fields suggested to us by these images. As we perceive these smells, they become part of us, of our memory and our life experience. All of these elements acquire simultaneously an objective and a subjective nature: objective in their state of existing independently of us and subjective as representations of the connection between reality and our consciousness. Throughout this process of thinking and feeling *with*, the gaze pays attention to details, by slowing down the rhythm of processing images and cultivating observation and awareness to *how* things are expressed rather than *what* is shown. This shift allows for associations where faces become landscapes that we can smell and touch just as we do with a flower or with the grass. This form of writing nurtures the sensitivity and attention to seeing, by opening perception to processes that are easily left behind, insofar as they are performed tacitly. The same degree of attention, which is highly intuitive, forms the core of Bergson's philosophy, as it enables the mind to take note of the object of its perception and ultimately of itself. In doing so intuition grounds the material universe depicted in this footage in what Bergson calls 'a given world', that while being limited by perception to certain utilizable images (those that are the subject of our attention), manages to overflow perception.

Stylistically, imaginative writing is able to engage with the semiotic structure of the image by opening up the writing process to bodily impressions – which are, according to Bergson, those undergoing a process of selection and suppression through the passage from pure perception to the representation of the object as it stands for us. The language deployed by imaginative writing generates a vocabulary able to speak about what is usually inaccessible, because considered to be deeply internalized as it is part of a perceptual experience, made of reflections, emotions and attitudes. If writing *about* the home movie takes into account this filmic universe as a representation of the domestic space, writing *with* it, as is the case of imaginative writing, brings to light its core perceptual structure. In this respect, imaginative writing transcends representation understood as a denotative or connotative meaning-making structure. It uncovers, instead, elements that might appear as secondary or too abstract to compose the narrative structure of filmic material, yet are central for the home movie, a filmic form that lacks the linear and conventional narrative structure that other forms of visual

material possess. In doing so, this form of writing loosens up the relation between the signifier and the signified in the home movie, managing to stand closer to Bergson's understanding of pure perception.

I deploy imaginative writing not only to help me tailor my film analysis to the analytical needs of my body of footage, but also to further explore the notions of time and space in these films. I will address in more depth this ethnographic approach of the home movie's spatio-temporal dimension in the dedicated chapter of the thesis. Right now, I would simply like to point out the importance of this creative method. Imaginative writing re-contextualises the analytical frame of ethnography by asking how the Sicilian home movie object becomes evocative through an embodied experience of space and time. By putting imaginative writing into dialogue with drawing, I investigate the meaningfulness that goes beyond what is actually present in the home movie (Symonds, 2019). Experiencing the same places in which these films were shot by using an artistic lens, I explore a home movie universe that is as much the filmmaker's as it is of the audience. This imaginative approach makes the home movie appear to us each time anew, as we open these audio-visual texts over and over again. As one of the creative approaches influencing theory and opening the exploration of the Sicilian home movie to novel reading possibilities, creative practices such as imaginative writing is guided by intuition as a sensible form of knowing things, which traditional research has a hard time unpacking. As such, creative practice is not about the creative transformation of these films<sup>16</sup>, but rather about the transformation of disciplinary research frames in a creative way, so as to capture knowledge registers of the home movie that would otherwise not be possible to grasp through the lens of traditional methods. In the following chapter, I explore in greater depth the methodological novelty of the project and the ways in which it contributes to advancing research in the field of the home movie.

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<sup>16</sup> This is the case of the creative reuse of home movies. For further details, please refer back to the Introduction.

# CHAPTER 4.

## Methodology

### 4.1 Impact and originality of the method

As already noted, Sicilian home movies are non-edited fragments of filmic material that speak to us in a personal manner; from the moment of their creation, these materials have been looked at, touched, commented and passed on. Yet since their passage into the public domain, we seem to be looking at them from a distance. In fact, these films have been explored by history as counter-narratives to mainstream research, by media studies as home mode genres, by archival studies as community collections and by film studies as material for creative reuse. While these disciplines deal with archives as static objects or proofs of the past, to which we keep on applying pre-existing frames of analysis, they fail to acknowledge their potential as dynamic constructs that are constantly re-interpreted and actualized through a constant engagement with them. Such approaches do not highlight the potential of these films to interact creatively with the present, so as to reframe their meaning based on the actual lived experience that these films imply and not only based on existing disciplinary frames that can be endlessly replicated to accommodate different analytical contexts. The main purpose of my project is to challenge this static notion of these home movies as archives of the past and find ways to bring them back into the present. The best way to do this is through different artistic and creative practices that can transform interaction modalities so as to develop authentic and direct ways of engaging with these materials. This leads me to propose a different path of exploration, one that is hands-on and experimental and involves categories of audiences in proposing new approaches and frames for working with these cultural assets that ultimately lead to uncovering novel reading modalities.

In doing so, the project distances itself from preconceived ideas that perception of the home movie is exclusively formed in the mind, that language can holistically explain this perceptual experience<sup>17</sup> and that the subject who perceives this material is the only one invested

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<sup>17</sup> According to the 7-38-55 rule developed by psychology professor Albert Mehrabian at the University of California, only 7% of meaning is communicated through spoken words, 38% through the tonality of the voice and 55% through body language (Mehrabian, 1971). This means that a really small percentage of what we know can be expressed through words. In this context, creative practice becomes an interesting tool able to complement our linguistic capacity of conveying meaning.

with agency. Instead, it opens up to the influence of artistic methods that can transform our experience of the archive through intuition. As a result, such creative methods transform perception, expanding it beyond conventions into a free interpretative domain. Here, the Sicilian corpus of home movies turns into an ‘object in becoming’ that appears different each time we open it, undergoing a process of constant actualization. As a mechanism of constant creation of meaning, the process of actualization, opens the reading of the home movie to multiple registers of visual experience, bodily expressions and affective impressions. These are ways of knowing that, contrary to traditional expressive forms such as language, operate through intuition, imagination and sensuousness rather than through pure reasoning. This practice-led approach represents an original method insofar as it does not simply replicate existing analytical frames belonging to conventional research but takes inspiration from the arts to shift these disciplinary frames of analysis in order to shed light upon novel ways of understanding the Sicilian home movie archive.

In practical terms, I undertake an iterative process, where I test creative tools such as imaginative writing, drawing, sound recording and film editing against critical theory falling into three traditional frames of investigation: film analysis, ethnographic investigation and participatory methods. I selected these approaches insofar as they represent the three main disciplinary lenses through which the home movie has been framed so far and about which I have spoken more in-depth in the Introduction. The purpose is to assess how a creative exploration of these analytical frames can produce disembodied and affective ways of knowing the Sicilian home movie archive. Departing from the value of academic research, the project aims to go a step further and explore if, through artistic practice, engagement and exhibition we can give rise to new modalities of reading the home movie that recognise their emotional response and their nonformalized textual approach, which in the end make up the true nature of these cultural assets. The practical purpose is to open up these archives to new modalities of understanding that try to value them and make them alive again; this positions the public as a reader of these images at the centre of the investigation process. What I ultimately want to explore through my methodological approach, is if and how we can become filmmakers, ethnographers or co-creators to our own condition, instead of relying on experts to tell us what and how we should look at these films. This is a process that contributes to empowering audiences to trace their own experience of the archive and not hand it over to other people for interpretation. As such, the levels of innovation of the project refer to the methodological approach and its impact on different target audiences. For archivists and film and media



scholars, the project envisages possibilities for alternative classifications and different film analysis modalities, which stand closer to the nature of the Sicilian home movie archive insofar as it does not rely on meta-data but on indexes of creative imaginaries that these records give rise to. For artists, the project sheds light on creative manipulation as a way of interrogating the nature of the home movie, rather than using it as a tool to creatively transform these cultural assets. As such, the tools and approaches developed during the project also target broader communities of people who do not professionally engage with these films. For example, developing and testing creative and participatory exercises together with art practitioners and social scientists, the project looks at how these methods can be further exploited to benefit a broader public of local communities and non-practitioners in order to facilitate novel readings of and forms of engagement with these archives. In the following section, I explain each research phase and how it addresses a specific sub-question that emerges from the main research question of the project.

## 4.2 Research plan

In my project, I deploy art as a practical method to shift analytical frames from a contemplative and analytical position to an active one that is able to capture lived experience surrounding these archives. The experimentation is articulated in three progressive steps and form an iterative process in which theory informs practice and practice refines theoretical notions. Using art as the core approach to facilitate a different form of expression of lived experience, I preceded this iterative process by an introductory phase that aims to better understand how creativity and artistic intervention influences and shapes our experience of the home movie archive (RQ1). To this aim, I conducted eleven interviews with Italian artists and filmmakers re-using this footage as part of new works. The interviews shed light upon artistic practice as a direct approach to the perceptual experience of the home movie that gives rise to surprising and less obvious creative universes. This initial stage helped me to better frame artistic practice as a hands-on approach to reading the archive. Through artistic practice, we can touch, sense and explore these materials in an unmediated way and begin to see some of the things researchers and archivists are pointing at when they speak of the home movie archive as being different and containing ‘something more’ (Wecker, 2018). This preliminary phase helped me to better acknowledge the potential of arts to generate novel reading modalities of the Sicilian home movie archive. What I therefore needed to find out was how such creative

practices can capture lived experience and therefore bring an added value to and even shift traditional analytical frames surrounding the home movie (RQ2). The core analytical frames I selected, that are connected to the three dominant ways of looking at home movies, are: film analysis, ethnographic exploration and participatory practice. I orchestrated the entire investigation process around creative methods and their impact on the selected analytical frames as an iterative process. Though this form of organisation, my practice was informed and came out through an exploration of critical ideas around visibility, embodiment and affectivity that are specific of these three analytical frames. Film analysis, for example, looks at how visual elements are orchestrating the structure of the footage (Hui-Yin Wu et al., 2017); ethnographic research aims to understand culture through felt and enlivened bodily experiences shaping everyday life (Csordas, 1994); and participatory practice creates spaces of affective encounter with the archive (Hwang, 2013). The questions addressed through this iterative process are:

- RQ2.1: How can we expand our visual analysis capacity in relation to these films, by tapping into formal and textual qualities of creative methods? To this end, I selected a series of shots, whose visual appeal I could not explain in clear terms and used imaginative writing and drawing as a way of trying to clarify their meaning. What I did is to write about them and also print out these scenes, re-draw them by hand and recompose them anew. The aim was to deconstruct a conventional way of seeing that looks for the immediate meaning in things and operates through intuition in order to bring out the tacit in these films, or that which cannot be verbally expressed. To this purpose, writing and drawing represent tools through which we can reimagine film analysis.
- RQ2.2: What role does our body play in a reading of the Sicilian home movie that highlights the felt and sensuous nature of these films? To this end, I undertook walks in the same places in which these films were shot in order to record sound, draw and write about my embodied experience of these films. This form of imaginative ethnography generated an embodied and emplaced form of reading the Sicilian archive that builds on lived experience, rather than on research observations. Creative methods become thus instruments through which we can interact, feel and think differently about these films and the lives of those people that they depict.
- RQ2.3: What forms of collective knowledge can we orchestrate that can offer new perceptual forms and uses of these films? How are these participatory forms informed by creative and imaginative methods? To this end, I worked with art

practitioners and social scientists to test and refine collective exercises that can bring to light new interaction models with these films, other than contemplation, visualisation or editing. These exercises were tested in the frame of two participatory workshops conducted in Italy and the UK. The wide range of imaginative and creative methods that have arisen during these workshops testify to the importance of collective knowledge in shaping the future of the Sicilian home movie archive.

In asking these questions, I used my own creative practice to refine, test and validate these ideas around tacit knowledge, embodiment and affectivity surrounding the Sicilian home movie. It is important to notice that playfulness and the imaginative power of creative practice was not intended to re-contextualise the footage or to offer it a new meaning. The entire iterative process was aimed at excavating the value of these films, grasping the sense of these visual fragments each time we look at them. The entire process is a double-ended one, asking each time what archives can do to make people engage with them, to render them interesting and relevant for the present. I therefore re-looked at these films, extracted scenes and re-made them as a way of registering information in a non-verbal way, thought about these films in terms of spatial and temporal experience and in terms of collective knowledge systems. This gradual move through a visual, embodied and collective experience of the Sicilian home movie archive enabled me to draw out three reading modalities that are positioned at the intersection of critical thinking and creative practice, that I explore deeper in the next chapters of my thesis.

Representing the core findings of my thesis, these reading modalities are orchestrated as an interactive documentary called *Spaesi: A poetics of Identity* (RQ3). The multiple levels of interaction with the material and the possibility to offer a more accessible format to the audience was central to my decision to choose Klynt as the appropriate software for the documentary. Organised as a vast digital space containing free-floating archipelagos or ‘islands of knowledge and experience’ – depicted as clickable objects inside a video of presentation – the i-doc gives access to these reading modalities. Its aim is to break the linearity of reading these materials as it enables users to browse through those archipelagos they are interested in and go back and forth through the footage. Integrated into the project website, the documentary stands as a tool next to a pdf-guide to undertaking creative exercises with these films, which digital users can download. While the documentary enables a loose reading of Sicilian home movie footage, the guide provides examples and exercises for people to be able to make their own experiments with home movies. The table below offers a snapshot of the research plan:

RQ: How can we design a Sicilian home movie archive of the present, that is reflective of the value of the material it preserves and at the same time stands closer to the communities through which these cultural assets are able to live on?					
Sub-questions:	Research stage	Overarching frame	Creative tools tested	Activities	Outputs
RQ1- How does creativity and artistic intervention influence and shape our experience of the Sicilian archive?	Preliminary investigation	Phenomenology	Qualitative interviews	11 interviews with Italian artists who reuse home movies	Productive imaginaries describing the lived experience of artists
<p>RQ2- How is arts practice able to transform theoretical frames of analysis of the home movie and to which new modalities of looking at the Sicilian home movie archive do they give rise to?</p> <p>RQ2.1: How can we expand our visual analysis capacity in relation to these films, by tapping into formal and textual qualities of creative methods?</p> <p>RQ2.2: What role does our body play in a reading of the Sicilian home movie that highlights the felt and sensuous nature of these films?</p> <p>RQ2.3: What forms of collective knowledge can we orchestrate, that can offer new perceptual forms and uses of these films?</p>	Exploring critical constructs as modalities of understanding the archive	Film analysis (semiotics)	Drawing + imaginative writing	A 'creative' frame for film analysis where I introduce drawing as a gesture that explores the tacit in the visual experience	25 creatively re-elaborated home movie scenes and their associated analytical files + PDF guide
		Ethnographic research	Drawing+ imaginative writing + sound recording	A series of walks in the places where these scenes were shot, where I use sound recording, drawing and imaginative writing to explore this embodied position.	5 binaural sound recording tracks 10 'postcards' (combine writing and drawing)
		Participatory practice	Co-creative workshops	Two co-creative workshops (Italy/UK) where people develop readings of these films based on creative exercises.	Drawings, recordings, text and video material resulting from the workshops + PDF guide
RQ3- How can we orchestrate these reading modalities in a way that reflects the fluidity, interactivity and open-endedness of the archive?	PRESENTATION FORMAT OF CORE RESEARCH FINDINGS: Interactive documentary 'Spaesi: A poetics of identity'				

In the next section, I will explain the rationale behind the preliminary investigation phase, in terms of how the interviews shaped my approach to the archive. In doing so, I tap into the notion of ‘the gestural’ as both a conceptual and a creative way of looking at the Sicilian home movie archive that enables me to set up an iterative exploration process that tests creative practice against critical theory and critical theory against creative practice.

### 4.3 The gestural in the Sicilian Home Movie

Gestures are ubiquitous in our lives. We use them to convey information about culture, thought, emotion, cognition, etc (Ishino et al., 2011). I use the gestural in visual communication to explore a stance that lies between the communicable and that which is noncommunicable as it expresses the capacity to “dwell in thought” (Agamben, 1999, p.77). This perspective of the gestural implies a level of vitality that goes beyond historical and social frames, or that which is determined by culture, and passes instead, as Carrie Noland says, into a domain of “originality and creativity” (Noland, 2009, p.2). To this end, my use of the gestural stands close to an idea of knowing by doing; gestures become part of a process that lies between action and reaction, theory and practice and therefore expands the expressive capacity of seeing. This is reflective of the position I adopt in my project in order to establish a dialogue between creative practice and critical constructs that ultimately leads to exploring new modalities of understanding these archives.

A first approach to the gestural in the context of the Sicilian home movie has emerged from my initial talks with archivists in the archives in Bologna and Palermo. My investigation of these archives inevitably opened a dialogue with archivists, insofar as they act as points of reference for these films and assist activities surrounding the research and reuse of these collections. What struck me from the beginning was the tendency of archivists to sit down with me and explain what was going on in these films: the families that these films belonged to, the places depicted but, above all, the ‘gestures’ that the people in these images were performing and what they meant. This form of presenting the archive was, of course, precious, as it conveyed a historically and culturally rich picture of these films. Nevertheless, I soon noticed that their indications tended to condition my own way of looking at these films. I therefore decided early on to watch these films alone, focusing my attention on what was going on inside the image, on the gestures people performed.

Taking, as an example, a scene from the Liga family's home movies in which a man and a woman seem to play out an amusing love declaration, where the former tries to conquer the woman by offering her some fennel, we become aware of the connotations of these gestures. These become symbols of love and courtship that turn into gestures of play. Yet equally important is the fact that these gestures also signal 'something more'.



*Still min 5:20 from the Liga Family footage*

What these images also show is an affirmation of power in a traditional culture ruled by men, in which the woman's role is limited to taking care of the household. The woman's hasty gestures with the red toy hammer manifest a power affirmation, a will to stand up to a hierarchical culture that, even if seen from the outside as heavily dominated by men, could manifest something completely different in an intimate sphere. The gesture of hitting the man with the toy hammer and refusing his courtship, even if played out as a game, captures here something essential about the woman's position in Sicilian culture of the 1960s. Gesturing becomes more than physical movement; it includes an element of playful mimesis, which underneath a more direct symbolism acts out a power response to a patriarchal society. This is what the red toy hammer in the hand of the woman amounts to – a much more serious realisation of the power to stand up and manifest one's own will and determination. Beyond embodying a culture's own way of doing, feeling and understanding life, these gestures are also able to question or even to renew the meaning of people's actions. Surfacing from the depths of individual and at the same time collective imagination, gestures mobilise moving, doing and sensing and manage to inform our being in multiple ways. Although gesture as a "motor and assemblage of aesthetic affect" (Gustafsson et al., 2017, p.1) has remained rather unexplored in film and media studies, it plays an essential role inside the filmic universe. Film

is, in the end, nothing more than a succession of gestures. As the French cinema critic Stephane Delorme writes:

A film is an ensemble of gestures, and it is those gestures that one reviews and appraises. The gesture goes beyond form and denotes an engagement with the world. How to look at the other? Raising, lowering, observing, admiring, criticising, denouncing, affirming, negating... (Delorme, 2013, p.77)

Positioned between the discursive and the instinctual, the culture-specific and the universal, the corporeal and the visual, the gestures in the example above occupy an ambiguous position between codified messages and natural expression. The woman's bodily attitude and gestures represent contemporaneously the instinctual drive towards play and complicity but also a much deeper reaction to the social and moral context of community life. As a mode of mediation between the instinctual and the codified, the gestural is able to express contemporaneously the freedom to act and resist. The gestural in the home movie marks, on the one hand, an extremely important bond with speech as communication – home movies are generally silent movies in which bodily gestures stand for verbal communication – and on the other hand the manifestation of the “non-communicable potential of dwelling in thought” (Agamben, 1999, p.77). It is thus positioned between communication and ontology, between the explicit and the implicit and forms fertile ground for imaginative and creative explorations.

The richness of the gestural, marking scenes such as the one analysed above, builds a favourable context for artistic practice. In fact, the home movie has been looked at as material that can be easily re-contextualised (Bertozzi, 2013) using creative methods; this has a lot to do with the liminal position of the gestural exemplified through the case above. The gestural in the home movie invites artists to explore the numerous creative possibilities of these images. A creative approach oscillating between form and content, materiality and meaning of the archive, reads gestures as movements that make sense in their rhythm, sequence and style rather than in their quality of denotative constructs. This approach to the filmic style sets the accent on a poetic and vertical investigation of these films rather than on their discursive or technical construction and therefore opens up new possibilities of reading these materials.

In order to better assess how creative practice can establish new frames through which to look at these films, I decided to conduct eleven interviews with Italian filmmakers and artists who reuse these films for creative purposes. My interest in these semi-structured interviews was to understand the ‘lived experience’ of these artists, in order to better comprehend what motivates their creative gestures. The interviews contained a series of ten questions, divided in

three parts. I tried to keep the first series of questions identical for all interviewees, as they served as a sort of introduction and loosening up of the atmosphere. The second and third series of questions varied based on the evolution of the dialogue.<sup>18</sup> After a first and second coding process where I tried to identify the recurring themes emerging from the interviews, I realised that a more interesting approach emerged from the analysis of the key words that I wrote down during the interviews and the notes that I made while transcribing and re-reading the interviews (surrounding mainly the visions and approaches of these artists). This process helped me to acquire a better understanding of artists' reuse experience; as Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi rightfully notice, such notes provide an interesting approach to "using our imagination to strip away the unessential properties of things" (Gallagher et al., 2007, p.30). To this end, these conversations came close to what Simon Hoffding and Kristian Martiny call phenomenological interviews (Hoffding and Martiny, 2015). Phenomenological interviews are used to acquire first-person descriptions of an experience by trying to understand the structure of the experience, while being aware of the subjective position of the interviewee and at the same time constructing subjectivity as embodied and embedded (Hoffding et al., 2015, p.562). This analysis proved the phenomenological value of these interviews by pointing to the formulation of specific 'productive imaginations' that emerged from my notes.

By productive imaginaries, I do not refer to an abstract and creative universe, often defined as what is in the head of the artist, nor to sources of inspiration, but rather to the interrelation between a real and virtual universe that reflects a specific way of looking at the home movie that stimulates the materialisation of creative possibilities and opportunities. More concretely, productive imagination defines the artists' approach to the home movie, which becomes instrumental in assessing how their creative and imaginative universes come about during reuse. The origins of the concept of productive imagination go back in time as far as Aristotle. Its rich history led to a variety of philosophical conceptualizations that played a fundamental role in Kant, German Idealism, Romanticism, Phenomenology and Hermeneutics.<sup>19</sup> In my project, I conceive of productive imagination as the specific cognitive capacity through which the absent becomes present (Zoller, 2018). This theoretical stance, falling into the Kantian schematism of understanding, conceives of productive imagination as

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<sup>18</sup> For the full interviews, please see: <http://homemoviesicily.com/index.php/interviews/>.

<sup>19</sup> A more detailed history of the concept of productive imagination can be found in: Geniusas S., Nikulin D., 2018, *Productive Imagination: Its History, Meaning, and Significance*, Social Imaginaries, Rowman and Littlefield International, Lanham, MD, United States, and Geniusas S., Nikulin D., 2018, *Stretching the Limits of Productive Imagination: Studies in Kantianism, Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, Social Imaginaries, Rowman and Littlefield International, Lanham, MD, United States.



that which, rather than being located in logical or emotional reasoning, occupies a third position that is external to these two cognitive poles (Kant, 1998). From this position of mediator, imagination connects “sensibility and understanding” (Kant, 1998, p. 124), facilitating an otherwise interrupted communication in their striving for knowledge. In the context of the project, productive imagination facilitates the adoption of a perceptual position that connects and mediates between logical and emotional knowledge registers of the archive. These productive imaginaries are neither exclusive – there are, for sure, further imaginaries to be uncovered through other interviews – nor fully subjective, representing the individual position of each artist. Sometimes observations of the same artist led to the formulation of several imaginaries. Other times, more artists helped to shape the same imaginary but from a different angle. The analysis led to the formulation of five such productive imaginaries:

- ‘*The latent life*’. This latent side reveals those aspects of the home movie which are ‘not-spoken about’, but which are embedded in the filmmaker’s practice. To look at the home movie this way means reading between the lines, exploring the empty space between the family story and the history of the moving image.
- ‘*The vital act*’. The natural instinct of the filmmaker leads him or her to film images that become essential, vital for that which they are able to safeguard and transmit. The vitality of the images is uncovered through a mix of casualty and artistic passion embedded in the artist’s gestures.
- ‘*The Other Story*’/*transcendence*. Sometimes, watching home movies can become nauseating, due to the frequent repetition of a thematic scheme. Yet when we change perspective and look at the story which the home movie narrates as an ‘add-on’, we can truly perceive its essence. The essence lies in the concept behind the obvious story and the archive collaborates to develop this concept, going beyond a formal, narrative line of enquiry.
- ‘*The Alchemic Gesture*’. It is possible to look at the home movie as the reconstruction of a universe belonging to a private diary, manifested as a spectral element, similar to a body that is neither dead nor alive. These invisible connections and relations belonging to this universe are able to set the basis of a new artistic work autonomously, similar to an alchemic gesture.
- ‘*An Emotional and Genetic Imaginary*’. The home movie represents, through its intimate nature, matter that evokes a variety of sensations. In a certain way, these sensations become embedded in the genetics of those people who have grown up

surrounded by those images. It is as if the images themselves and the way of shooting them becomes part of their DNA but spreads also through the genetic code of entire communities, whose lives they manage to capture.

A closer look at these productive imaginaries underlines the transformative potential implicit in the process of creative reuse. The *Latent Life* foregrounds an already pre-existing capacity of the archive that needs to be activated. In the *Vital Act* resides the necessary liveliness and movement of ideas, which make the image come to life in the eyes of the beholder. The *Other Story* talks about potential narratives. The *Alchemic Gesture* suggests a transformation or becoming of matter. Lastly, the *Emotional and Genetic Imaginary* speaks through a sensorial and familiar dimension. All these imaginaries, although originating in the relationships of individual artists and filmmakers with the image, call upon broader values and experiences. As containers of pre-personal and indefinite potential, or in other words, resources of ‘other’ possibilities and connections, these universes reflect worldviews opening up towards everyday life. They become part of an actualization of the gaze, a sort of containers for different instruments that are necessary for the enactment of perception. Rather than operating through associations or connotations, emerging from the subjective position of the artist, these imaginaries reflect potentialities of the material and need to operate through gestures of dissociation and division. In doing so, they generate divergent lines along which seeing does not favour reproduction, but looks instead at actualizing reality through intuition and originality (Bergson in A1-Saji, 2010). Productive imaginaries as containers of potentialities generate novel vocabularies, able to make and undo our way of seeing (Bergson in A1-Saji, 2010) in order to speak about the home movie in a less conventional way. Through creative practice, artists step beyond binary thinking, positioning themselves somewhere between the visible and the invisible, between matter and memory or reason and feelings, in order to read the Sicilian home movie from a new perspective. This approach to the gestural in the process of creative reuse does not generate symbolisms or attach concepts to the interpretation of the home movie, insofar as this would turn archives into self-referential objects. In fact, Bergson says that “to try a concept on an object is to ask of the object what we have to do with it, what it can do for us” (Bergson, 1912, p.177). Instead, this process aims at a renewal of the home movie archive by interrogating its creative power. And again, Bergson affirms that “to label an object with a concept is to tell in precise terms the kind of action or attitude the object is to suggest to us” (Bergson, 1912, p.177). What the concept of productive imaginary ultimately points to is a model of perceptual attention, of opening our senses and being to experience, as a state of

shifting, yet grounded, level of awareness, arising through a specific bodily stance. This awareness underlines a dialogue between the visible and the invisible dimensions of the Sicilian home movie in the attempt to construct meaning.

Passing from the gestural as a practical construct through which we build our interpretation of what is going on in the home movie, to the gestural as a way of getting to know these films through a creative and imaginative lens, the interviews point to the favourable position of arts-based practice for uncovering novel ways of looking at these films. The arts determine a renewal of perception, of the way we engage with and experience the archive. It does so by opening the footage to an exploratory perceptual field that is marked by the freedom and the playfulness of the gaze and senses, that facilitates an experimentation with the materiality of the archive and its visual registers, leading to a formulation of original creative universes. In practical terms, artistic methods, in contrast to disciplinary frames of analysis, are able to pay attention to the cinematic style not as a composition of technical elements, but as a sensible structure unfolding vertically. Maya Deren speaks in *Poetry in the Film* (1970) about a vertical progression of film structure that is comparable to poetry rather than prose and that is concerned not with “what is occurring, but with what it feels like, of what it means” (Deren, 1970, pp, 173-74). Disciplinary analytical frames are unable to fully capture the qualities and depth of film, i.e. its rhythmic and internal structure. What we need is a different kind of ‘language’ that can speak about film’s depth.

Arts-based practice provides us with the necessary vocabulary that unfolds gestures which are able to reflect on the vertical structure of film through a process of mirroring and mimesis. Practices such as drawing, imaginative writing and audio-visual recording represent methods able to generate new visual discourses and introduce alternative modes of sensory perception. At the same time, they constitute modalities of taking ‘action’ towards the archive that is reflected in the specific activity of reuse of these films. In the last section of this chapter I explore how the gestural in art, understood as a way of knowing by doing, can help us reimagine ways of looking differently at the Sicilian home movie archive. These novel modalities are positioned at the intersection of practice and critical theory and form the core approach of my methodology.

## 4.4 Novel modalities of reading the Sicilian Home Movie

In my project, I approach the concepts of the tacit or pre-linguistic, embodiment and affection, as three different ways through which the Sicilian home movie can speak to us. Each modality is representative for the corpus of footage I deal with, insofar as it introduces ways of knowing the archive that unfolds through the immediacy of lived experience. I choose to explore each modality through the lens of artistic practice, insofar as it enables me to go beyond the simple registration, documentation or representation of data and capture the experience of the archive. As the semiotician Roland Barthes said: “imagery, delivery, vocabulary spring from the body and the past of the writer and gradually become the very reflexes of his art” (Barthes, 1968, p. 10-11). Art operates through a language that is self-sufficient as it is deeply anchored in the depths of the author’s personal experience. Deploying art practice as an explorative tool that is intuitive, sensuous and imaginative makes space for an extended notion of *perception*, that is able to challenge the boundaries of a semiotic, ethnographic and participatory investigation of these films. More than representing a simple means to disseminate results, art-based research tackles those issues that tradition can only partly deal with signifying systems falling outside of the field of semiotics, the role of the body and the ‘sensing-self’ in experience and the dynamics of collective knowledge. Each of the next three chapters in my thesis is going to look a particular type of modality, how it is tested, explored, refined and evidenced through artistic practices. Before going deeper into each modality, I will briefly outline how I selected these practices and how this choice enabled me to explore each modality as a critical construct positioned at the intersection of theoretical thinking and practice.

### 4.4.1 Tacit modality

As a predominantly visual object, the Sicilian home movie operates through aesthetic data registers, foregrounding our direct and unmediated engagement with the sensuous properties of these films. Simultaneously, it represents a tacit form of getting to know these films. The tacit refers to what Steven Taylor defines as ‘aesthetic muteness’ (Taylor, 2002) i.e. the difficulty of translating aesthetic experience and judgements into verbal, analytical language. Standing at the core of cognitive research about human knowledge, pre-linguistic or direct knowledge is that form of knowledge that is not necessarily associated with any form of linguistic expression. As a result of immediate experience, pre-linguistic knowledge presents

things as they are, without having to name them. Artistic practice provides a fresh and different perspective on our object of study (Dunn & Mellor, 2017) that loosens conventional meaning-making structures and makes space for new associations that do not pertain to the domain of semiotics, but to the pre-linguistic sphere. Drawing, for example, makes use of colours, lines and shapes, as we would deploy words, sentences and verbal expressions. By using it as a tool to re-imagine entire home movie scenes, I give voice to the Sicilian home movie using a different vocabulary made of gestures, colours and visual cues. Freeing the archive from pre-established frames of analysis through drawing thus means changing the course of its narrative and encouraging the audience to look beyond a semiotic approach for interpreting these films. By expanding the area of analysis of the Sicilian corpus of footage to the domain of the pre-linguistic, these practices can become innovative tools that push the boundaries of visual exploration of the home movie.

#### 4.4.2 Embodied modality

Depicting everyday life of communities, these films enable us to understand Sicilian culture by speaking to us through gestures and actions that form an embodied way of relating to the world. As such, embodiment is concerned with motor skills and habitual actions, with the perception of the environment (spatial behaviour), sense of self and nonverbal behaviour. According to Merleau-Ponty, embodied knowledge is not confined to motor skills, but regards the variety of human experiences that arise from a pre-reflective correspondence between the body and the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). Embodiment becomes a way of experiencing the Sicilian home movie through and with the body. In my project, I use imaginative ethnography as an embodied and emplaced method to get closer to these films and understand what they try to show us. Imaginative ethnography is a field of research exploring social and cultural systems through emerging and experimental methodologies that integrate and fuse creative arts, digital media and sensory ethnography.<sup>20</sup> In this sense, imaginative universes refer to the recognition of creativity and imagination as core components of human relations. The experimental methodology deployed by imaginative ethnography makes room for open-ended enquiry that takes up risks and unforeseen outcomes. Through its more-than-representational power of inquiry, imaginative ethnography assists me with eliciting and communicating unarticulated

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<sup>20</sup> For more information, please see the activity of the Centre of Imaginative Ethnography: <https://imaginative-ethnography.com>

experiences and concealed understandings of the Sicilian corpus of footage by stepping in the footsteps of their creator, i.e. the place where these films have been shot. Returning to these places and recording the experience using different media such as writing, sound recording and drawing, I use imagination not as the mere replica of perception, but as a process for eliciting and doing justice to the complexity of experience in relation to the Sicilian home movie. By “promoting a form of understanding that is derived or evoked through emphatic experience” (Eisner, 2008, p.7), these methods enrich disciplinary thinking (Cohen 2018, Dunn et al. 2017, Franz 2010, Kara 2015). Imaginative methods open up ethnographic enquiry towards new possibilities for the researcher to hear, see and feel and thus facilitate an embodied stance that can bring to light sensuous ways of reading the archive.

#### 4.4.3 Affective modality

What is maybe most poignant about home movies is their capacity to evoke emotions by looking at the past through a nostalgic lens. The Sicilian home movie, specifically, conveys a dense familiar universe that is marked by intense relations and affective interactions.<sup>21</sup> Yet the emotional chord that these films strike uncovers a much more complex system of interaction with these films in which emotions, affect and feelings should not be confused with one another. Affect is hard to define insofar as it is not a state, a feeling or a condition. I deploy the concept of affect as an embodied way to engage with the home movie that is nevertheless unconscious. Affect becomes a pre-personal and therefore unconscious experience of intensity that corresponds to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another, modifying its capacity to act (Deleuze et al., 1987). How are we able to use artistic practice to facilitate an affective encounter with the Sicilian home movie without falling into the banality of listing the emotions that these films evoke? In my project I do this by using different artistic exercises in the frame of two participatory workshops (UK and Italy) conducted with creative practitioners and social scientists. I use art as a way of engaging communities in action research processes that transcend age, education, language and cultural barriers (Dunn et al., 2017, p.294). The aim is to expand on existing workshop practices<sup>22</sup> in order to test how arts can be

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<sup>21</sup> This is my personal conclusion after having watched hundreds of minutes of Sicilian home movies.

<sup>22</sup> An example is the 2019 workshop organised by *Home Movies Bologna* in collaboration with Michele Bernardi using the method of rotoscoping to re-imagine home movie scenes and the one organised by the *Museo del Mare* mentioned in the introduction. These workshops use artistic and creative practice as tools to explore either social and cultural issues or media aesthetics. In this sense, the home movie becomes a vehicle that enables people to reflect upon certain themes through the qualities of the visual medium, rather than remaining the object of enquiry.

used to give rise to a collective way of knowing and looking at these films that is more relatable insofar as it originates from the immediate experience of communities.

The practice conducted in this project was thus informed by an exploration of the critical ideas of the tacit, embodied and affective in the Sicilian home movie. The aim is to assess if and how these constructs work in practice and how they can orchestrate an experience of the Sicilian home movie archive that is representative of the present and looking towards the future. The following three chapters are thus structured around these three emerging modalities.

## CHAPTER 5.

### What my hands know: *guidelines* to a non-verbal reading of the Sicilian archive *or* THE TACIT MODALITY

Watching a Sicilian home movie, we are confronted by a succession of fast sequences showing an incredible array of festivities, parties, family gatherings, vacations or any other format of community event. Disguised behind the banality of everyday events, these films can sometimes inadvertently hold our attention. When they do so, we are not always able to say precisely what it is that keeps us hooked to or amazed by these films. The Sicilian home movie's promise of an easy disclosure of meaning remains entangled in a much more complex sense-making structure. This is what attracted me to these films and encouraged me to look for different ways of exploring this growing fascination. I wanted to foreground the different nuances hidden behind an apparently simple aesthetic façade. My reflection on the nature of the home movie, and one that occupies the role of artistic statement of the project, builds on this assumption that the Sicilian home movie is a fascinating object, yet never an easy one to deal with. It thus calls for a different form of exploration, compared to other films, and for a much more imaginative interpretation. My artistic statement opens in the following manner: *Home movies are matter that has already been written, ideas that have been already thought, a different syntactic vocabulary transmitted through a specific medium, which lies open to everyone. Each scene is a language in itself. Dealing with this footage means we are not able to write down things on a blank page, but we necessarily perform a delicate juggling with thoughts and feelings.*<sup>23</sup>

While these materials lie open to everyone, the way we look at them, treat them and speak about them becomes a delicate intervention. How do we deal with bursting uninvited in someone's private life? What sensations does this give rise to and how do we manifest ourselves in front of an intimate universe that surprisingly unravels right before our eyes? These questions point to the fact that simply speaking about home movies might not suffice to grasp the entire sensorium involved in the apprehension of these films. There is more in a home movie's appearance than being cute, amusing, touching, blunt or any other way we might want

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<sup>23</sup> This is the opening reflection of the artistic statement of my project. I refer to the rest of it, in the conclusions.



to describe it. Moreover, from a methodological perspective, this raises several challenges. As Nada Endrissat rightfully notes:

Methodologically, the focus on aesthetic work comes with some challenges. How to explore and ‘capture’ the embodied and tacit knowledge, the aesthetic judgement and decision-making, the non-verbal elements and the sensing that it involves: the hidden, unspoken, felt sense, that constitutes aesthetic work. (Endrissat, 2019, p.316).

In fact, while film analysis tells us how these films technically appear to us, by describing camera movements, lighting or types of shots, they fail to capture how they work for the general public. The non-formalised nature of the home movie calls instead for a more relatable approach in analysing them. Could we think for example about ways of transforming film analysis or other analytic frames that are traditionally used in research, so as to expand their analytical capacity? What methods are able to capture the embodied and tacit knowledge that Endrissat speaks about and how do they match a more critical vision of the Sicilian home movie?

In my project, I use artistic practice as a tool to explore how these critical frames can be transformed as to bringing us closer to a more relatable way of engaging with the Sicilian home movie. In doing so, I explore my corpus through analysis and creative interventions. This gives rise to an iterative process that enables me to test practice against critical theory and critical theory against practice, in the attempt of finding new modalities through which we understand these films. These reading modalities are thus hybrid constructs that combine critical frames of analysis with practical and creative processes such as drawing, sound recording, imaginative writing and participatory workshops, that I have been inspired to test throughout the engagement with my corpus of footage. Each of the three chapters is going to look at a particular type of modality (tacit, embodied, affective), how it is tested, explored, refined and evidenced through different creative and imaginative practices and what it can bring new to the way we can engage with these films.

In this chapter, I am going to explore the concept of tacit modality, that refers to the way home movies not only speak *to* us, but also speak *through* us. Artistic practice such as drawing and imaginative writing are expressive instruments that go beyond language; in doing so they are able to say something more about these films and the way we perceive and engage with them. By integrating such methods in film analysis, I look at how we are able to give rise to aesthetic judgements surrounding these films that words alone or technical elements of film

analysis cannot bring to the fore. I have chosen to intervene through drawing to formulate a potentially new frame for film analysis that is able to capture those elements of the home movie which cannot be technically identified or verbally expressed. I hope that this experimental form of engaging with the Sicilian home movie will enable me to iteratively explore the nature of these concepts and see how they are applicable to and through practice. The tacit or pre-linguistic approach is that which we know about the Sicilian home movie but cannot put into words. Drawing becomes important to think critically about the non-verbal elements that build our perceptual sensorium in relation to the home movie. Such forms of expression look at how things, that we didn't know were initially there, can come to the fore.

### 5.1 Looking for the third meaning in Sicilian home movies

When we express an idea, a feeling or a judgement about a film that we have seen, we recur to a cognitive process through which a signifier (the object of perception) is associated to a signified (which value we attribute to it). This value can be appreciative, sentimental, judgemental or touching upon belief systems or values. In film analysis, for example, meaningful units of investigation are composed of technical and narrative elements that show us how movies are made: what camera movements build the shot, how these movements are organised, how light is being used and the proximity of the camera to the filmed object (Aumont, Michel, 1988). In doing so, these elements set up analytical frames that aim to establish a direct relation between what is perceived and how it should be interpreted. What if, instead of this structure, we imagined an orchestration of elements that is not based on the association of technical categories with pre-formulated intentions that we attribute to the filmmaker, but on the apprehension of movements that emerge more nuanced and subtle as they bring to light the interaction between the filmmaker and their environment? The deeper we peer into filmic elements to grasp these nuances, the more interesting but also harder our interpretation of these films becomes and the more we realise that we lack the necessary critical tools for this exploration.

In my project I look into the possibility of transforming film analysis by approaching it conceptually through a semiotic lens that goes beyond language, as a means of exploring meaning-making. To this end, I use Roland Barthes' semiotic model and his experiments with drawing as a method to expand the sphere of action of his theory. This approach integrates well with Bergson's model of actualization. Through actualization, the capacity to 'see' expands

into the domain of the sensible so as to include any experience that empowers the viewer to apprehend life more clearly (Gillies, 1996). In doing so, Bergson's holistic notion of perception, as a sensible form of intuition, becomes an interesting territory for testing Barthes' semiotic model that goes beyond the use of language. In the following paragraphs, I explore how Barthes' experiments with drawing can inspire the development of hands-on approaches through which we can expand film analysis.

In *Research notes on some Eisenstein Stills* published in *Image, Music, Text* (1977), Roland Barthes interestingly notes the existence of three levels of meaning (Barthes, 1977) that emerge through the filmic. The first level is an informational one, in which we apprehend what is objectively going on in the film. The second level is a symbolic level that refers to the denotative meaning of the images. Here we can locate the *myth* of the filmic image as a meta-language, transforming language into a means to speak about itself. When thinking at the scene belonging to the Liga family, used as an example in the previous chapter, we can clearly distinguish these two levels. In the first level of meaning, the two people have a good time on the street while surrounded by other people. In the second level, the woman's toy hammer and the fennel held by the man become symbols of conquest, transforming the scene into a contemporary play telling the story of 'Romeo and Juliet'. Yet we can go further than that. There is more in this scene than an innocent moment of amusement. There is something in the woman's eyes and gestures, in the way she seems partly to be pretending and partly to really mean what she is doing, that captures our attention. On the other hand, there is something into the man's attitude that makes us wonder what his intentions are. Their gestures not only stand for play and contentment, they are also able to question or renew the meaning of their actions.

This leads us to Barthes' third level of meaning that represents that part of the film to which we cannot assign a precise meaning, as we cannot capture it verbally. This is the case where meaning implodes, where the signifier cannot be associated to a specific signified. In fact, when I started to look at my corpus of footage, I had the feeling of finding much more than I could put into words. Often during my visits at the archives in Palermo and Bologna, I had the impression of sitting down in front of a computer and opening up folders of films that each time could speak to me in a different way than they did a day before. In such moments, I was overcome by that 'shadowy feeling' that Wecker speaks about in her thesis and that marks the presence of "something more that is nothing less than existential" (Wecker, 2018. p.218). This feeling emerged predominantly when I adopted a loose, intuitive process in which I watched the footage without prejudice about what I would find, without trying to assign to each

image a logical or emotional signification. This enabled me to follow the natural rhythm of scenes, the spontaneity of perceptual gesture, without necessarily tying it to a signified meaning. I soon realised that I could find these sorts of broken signs on many occasions when viewing the footage.

Broken signs are peripheral zones of meaning, where visual/acoustic signifiers do not find a signified value. From a theoretical perspective, they are analogous to concepts such as the punctum coined by Roland Barthes (Barthes, 1981), the affection-image defined by Gilles Deleuze (Deleuze, 2005) or transcendental film by Paul Schrader (Schrader, 2018). The home movie archive is full of broken signs; they are manifest in those scenes in which it is hard to describe what captures the audience's attention and confers upon the images an auratic dimension, insofar as they take the shape of gestures of everyday life. Through broken signs, we enter the sensible domain of the image, its mystifying power, the affects and values it transmits. This is a peripheral zone of meaning where visual cues do not communicate or stand for a symbolic, referential, diegetic or historical fact, but where meaning implodes, crumbling upon its own representation. Broken signs are touch points that cannot be described as they go beyond culture, knowledge and information. We would be tempted to position these broken signs in the realm of emotions; after all home movies are masters in triggering nostalgia and a variety of other sensations. Yet significance is not simple sensation; it adds to values, beliefs and ways of doing belonging to the beholder of the images and at the same time to the creator of the images. This subtle and tacit relationship established between the author of a work and the audience is something that also Jean-Paul Sartre is concerned with in his writings (Sartre, 1948), where he speaks about the complicity and the shared values between the writer and his public. Broken signs come from nowhere, they are utopias whose main aim is not to reveal but to fissure meaning. An analysis of the third meaning conveys, therefore, what is seen but cannot be named and through its nature cannot fall in the domain of language. In fact, Barthes' analysis of the third meaning or broken signs testifies to the capacity of the filmic to speak to its viewers in more than one language and opens up the debate about whether we can find other approaches than language, to analyse the full array of meanings of film.

After the selection of these scenes, I decided to build a Tumblr blog where I could use imaginative writing to explore the nature of these broken signs: <https://amateur-broken-signs.tumblr.com>. Writing about these specific scenes, I soon started to realise that the flow of thoughts felt incomplete. Somehow, the writing was not mirroring everything I was feeling, thinking and beginning to know about these scenes. At this point, I started to manually

manipulate these fragments, using Final Cut to draw in shapes and figures, to apply filters, textures and other effects. To some extent, this practice felt a bit more in line with my own impressions written down in the blog. After working on 36 scenes, I started to realise that the gap between my writing and the manipulations was expanding. Instead of converging towards a unity that makes sense through its ability to explain the broken signs of these scenes, writing and editing were drifting apart. By looking at these methods, I realised that it was often the case that one method started where the other method left off. Instead of being complementary, writing and editing were becoming part of a linear movement of thought and feeling that didn't allow for synchronicity, overlapping or simultaneity. Both writing and editing could very well stand on their own, without requiring the presence of the other. This led me to the conclusion that both my style of writing and visual manipulation had limitations, the most important ones being automation and standardisation. While editing gave me the freedom to apply different filters and effects with a certain speed, they managed to standardise my way of feeling and thinking about the scene. Through these pre-established effects I was able to grasp the overarching feel that guided my intuition, yet without going much in depth. On the other hand, imaginative writing tended towards a specific structure, which opened with an introduction, proceeded with a deeper exploration of an identified metaphorical sense of the broken sign and closed with a note on possible implications of these signs. These repetitive processes, to which I resorted in order to deal with the exploration of broken signs, were taking my writing and creative manipulation back to the sphere of representation from which I initially escaped.

I was soon in need of an expanded notion of semiotic analysis that went beyond written description of phenomena. To this end, I had a closer look at Roland Barthes' experiments with drawing. In fact, Roland Barthes contributed to expanding the application of semiotics to a broad range of cultural phenomena including the arts (Van den Braembussche, 1994). His research trajectory crossed different theoretical positions, leading eventually to a more poetical or creative interpretation in *Camera Lucida* (Barthes, 1981). The French philosopher not only wrote about meaning-making processes, he also used drawing to reflect upon them. Yet little is known about this side of his work. Throughout the 1970s, Barthes undertook a sustained practice of drawing and painting to which he makes almost no reference in his writing, but that became a sort of a routine towards the end of his life. In 2016, on the occasion of the exhibition 'Barthes/Burgin' at the John Hansard Gallery, curated by Stephen Foster, the French philosopher's experiments with drawings were more closely analysed (Bishop et al., 2016). The exhibition drew a parallel to the work of the painter Victor Burgin, who was deeply

influenced by Barthes and made interesting reflections on Barthes' use of drawing as a parallel to his writing. These reflections are based on Barthes' own disclosures about his practice in a series of lectures held at the College de France.

## 5.2 The invisible space of the gestural in drawing

In his series of lectures on the *Neutral*, which have been published posthumously, Barthes talks about his drawing practice as amateur, referring to it as “marginal, (a) type of violon d’Ingres” (Barthes, 1995, p.140). The role of the amateur is very important to Barthes, insofar as it enabled him to make use of a wide range of drawing mediums to undertake spontaneous and developmental experiments and exercises that liberated him from the conditions and constraints as a writer. According to Barthes, “the amateur seeks to produce only his own enjoyment (...) and this enjoyment is shunted toward no hysteria” (Barthes 1995, p.230). This notion of amateur drawing as a liberating and spontaneous practice represents a way to counter power structures and keep the writing pleasure open to unusual associations. We can see Barthes' drawings as experiments that bring his thoughts and reflections as a semiotician a step further. Looking carefully at the formal properties of his drawings (Fig.1), we note that the relationship between marks and ground are often blurred, pointing to a process of creation in which the spaces in between marks become an area of proximity that build a compositional whole of presence and absence.



Fig.1: Drawings by Roland Barthes under ‘Signifier without signified’ and ‘Neutral specificity’

Drawing de-structures space – both in terms of representation and as a location of practice. As such, it offers a form of discovery of ourselves and a world that is different from writing. Drawing as a form of capturing this world, as Barthes does, represents a “means of bringing

signification to a standstill, while still allowing the play of the very mark-making required before meaning can take hold: the clearing required before structure can emerge” (Bishop et al., 2016, p. 20). The importance that Barthes assigns to drawing as a meaning-making process becomes more obvious in his definition of the line. Talking about drawing, Barthes says: “the line is a visible action. The line, however supple, light or uncertain it may be, always refers to a force, to a direction; it is an *energon*, a labour which reveals – which makes legible – the trace of its pulsion and its expenditure” (Barthes, 1982, p.170). The energy, movement and direction of the hand tracing the line constitutes the essence of drawing. For Barthes, the gestural in drawing embodies a power and energy that come about through movement. Drawing thus resides not in the form of the final visual product (a reproduction), but in the process of making signs through gestures (an induced process). If we think about the home movie in terms of inscribing gestures in a visual space, we soon come to realise, that most of the times, the home moviemaker uses the visual space as a sort of canvas. Through hasty, trembling or targeted movements, he or she manages to offer an expression to the feelings, ideas or impulses that guide his/her hand. In doing so, the camera becomes more than the witness of what is happening in front of the screen; it becomes a tool through which what is going on behind the camera is deeply embedded in the unfolding of events. This form of filmic drawing performed by the home moviemaker is nevertheless subtle and implicit; it is an intransitive act that does not look towards representation but towards expression. There are, in fact, two forms of the gestural in drawing: the representative and the non-representative (Van Alphen, 2018). While the first defines a figural or representational disposition of lines, the second refers to an intransitive act, similar to Barthes’ drawings. In these drawings, the line is not read as a visual outcome but rather as an index of gestures, as echoes of the body and its movements.

Returning to the scene of the Liga family discussed before, we realise that the sum of gestures performed by the people in these images and by the filmmaker become an intransitive act of drawing with light. Looking at the scene frame by frame, we identify imperceptible camera movements that offer a sort of response to the woman’s hasty gestures (e.g. when she moves towards the man the camera bounces slightly back – see Fig 2). These inflexions of the camera testify to the filmmaker’s embodied response to a situation through which he inscribes sensorial impulses into the aesthetic dimension of the image.



*Fig.2 Still min 5:20 from the Liga Family*

Abandoning the search for a purposeful representation through this form of filmic drawing means, in fact, leaving space to the free flow of emotion, to the manifestation of the unconscious through spontaneity and immediacy. Together, the woman and the filmmaker draw a different image; an image that can be read as an index of sensations, instead of a series of camera movements. Looking at drawing as a tool for indexing the sensorium of the image, we could imagine using it to compose a home movie scene in which we become the actual filmmakers. Drawing could help us step back as viewers in order to better grasp that invisible space that arises between the home movie and its audience in the moment of perception. Marie-Jose Mondzain refers to this space when she says that “the image is only sustained through dissimilarity, in the space between the visible and the seeing subject. But is this space visible? If it were, it would no longer be a space. Thus, in the act of seeing here is an invisible gesture that constitutes the space of seeing.” (Mondzain, 2009, p.39) How then could intransitive drawing unfold these invisible spaces manifested as broken signs? What kind of understanding of the home movie image and of its perceptual modalities could it provide?

### 5.3 Surfaces of contact

To answer these questions, I experimented with drawing as a form of indexing the sensorium of the image that opens up the space of seeing to new readings. The entire process consists in printing out 25 of the selected scenes and using different drawing techniques to re-purpose the images. I then scanned the results frame by frame so as to recompose the scene and position it in the original place in the video. This process de-structured space, both in terms of representation and as a location of practice. Looking at the results of the process, several



common features emerged. Firstly, all scenes combined at least two approaches: one that drew on methods from printmaking and enabled me to transfer those parts of the images I wanted to leave untouched, and the other technique using either pencils, watercolour, charcoal or pastels. Secondly, throughout the process of manipulation, I intervened on human figures as little as possible. To this end, I used a transfer technique similar to the printmaking process to pass the original figure onto a new surface. Some human figures remained entirely unaltered such as in Fig. 4, while in others I kept only their faces (Fig. 3) and modified their bodies.



*Fig 3, 4 and 5 - Examples of drawing exercises*

Only two scenes (Fig. 6 and 7) did not follow this procedure. Here, I tried to explore notions of absence of identity. In Fig. 6, faces are replaced by doodles, in Fig. 7, I played with the presence and absence of faces, through which background colours or details from the original settings can emerge.



*Fig 6 and 7 - Examples of drawing exercises*

Although I predominantly intervened on the backgrounds of the selected scenes, this was not something intentional or pre-determined, but rather the result of an instinctual process. Combining watercolour with salts, alcohol or soaps, I developed a process that plays with the analogy of matter as an alchemic gesture. In my case, this form of ‘transmutation’ of matter shifts from the traditional chemical manipulation of the acetate surface of the film to an analogical chemical process that involves natural reactions between watercolours, salts, soaps, alcohol and water. In this sense, it offers an alternative to the dangerous experiments that filmmakers do with corrosive processes and plays out in an environment that is safer and

therefore more approachable by ordinary citizens. In contrast to how filmmakers<sup>24</sup> use the chemical process to highlight scratches, corrosions or other marks generated by the passage of time, my experiments approached the surface of images as a sort of blank canvas on which hand gestures trace the rhythm and immediacy of feeling. Following these gestures in an instinctual manner, that pays attention to the interaction of different chemical components on the paper rather than to their corrosive effect, shifts attention from notions of depth of field and perspective to notions of texture and surface. While depth of field is concerned with the organisation of spatial elements, texture is concerned with the movement through which spatiality emerges. This movement of matter, as an ordering of gestures on paper, creates the effect of a vacuum similar to Fig. 8 and 9, in which people and other elements appear as free floating. This use of intransitive drawing moves away from a strict sense of setting that is so important, yet also constraining for a loose reading of the Sicilian home movie. It moves, instead, towards more imaginary dimensions. These give rise to a form of reading that acts as an interface between the original text and ‘witnessing’ seen as the process through which the audience becomes an integral part of the perceptual process.



*Fig.8,9*

*Fig. 10 – closeup on*

The function of interface is better realised through a close-up of these newly formed spaces that uncovers areas made of pulses and movements that spring forth from nothing (Fig. 10). Here, drawing does not designate form, but a manner of seeing form that marks its singularity. In doing so, apparently repetitive backgrounds such as gardens, landscapes or domestic spaces, which home moviemakers love capturing in their films, are revealed as micro-spaces of contact. They establish contact points between what these places really are and how the filmmaker and subsequently the audience witness them. In other words, these spaces bring to light a more holistic perspective on perception that is shared between the three actors of the process: the filmmaker, the actual place that is the object of his perception and the audience.

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<sup>24</sup> I refer here to the experimental films produced by filmmakers such as Ken Jacobs, Stan Brakhage or Jonas Mekas, about whose work I talk in the Introduction of the thesis.

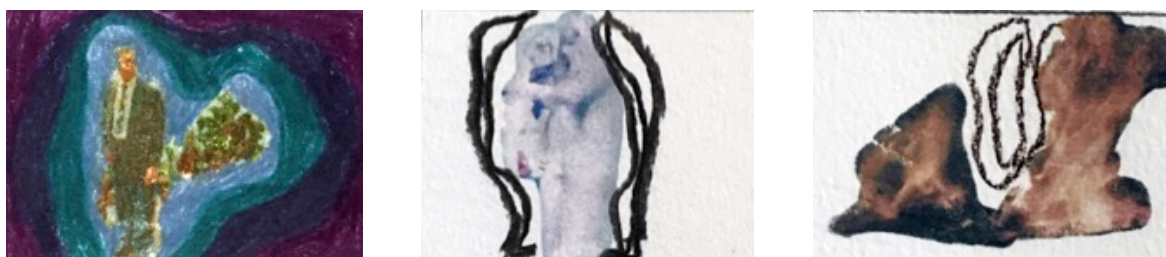
This exposure of space lies in the manner, mode and allure of the drawing gesture, the power of its movement. Instead of recognisable elements such as leaves, trees, flowers, streets or interior spaces, the gestural in drawing confronts us with intervals, inflexions, fluxes and torsions, i.e. movements of space that cannot be named but only experienced. In doing so, drawing highlights the coming into being of space rather than its structural appearance.

The gestural in drawing also influences temporal notions of film, as a sequence of single frames. The corpus of Sicilian home movies represents, to a great extent, footage characterised by an atmosphere of play, dynamism and movement. Outdoor scenes depicting rural or urban environments, and indoor ones which present family activities, are marked by high levels of dynamism: whether playing or engaging in a more contemplative activity, living/non-living elements always seem on the move. Instinctive drawing uses the line as a guiding principle in tracing this movement. Twisting, turning, defining areas of colour and blank spaces, the line does not possess an instrumental purpose that is at the service of the description of the observable; it defines instead a free, investigative and indeterminate space of play. This space has a threefold articulation. First, it unfolds as an internal movement, an intimate manifestation that is similar to an exchange of gentleness or a caress. In Fig. 11 and 12 the line follows the trace of this intimacy and articulates the intricacies and entanglements of feelings, generating a sort of overarching emotional web.



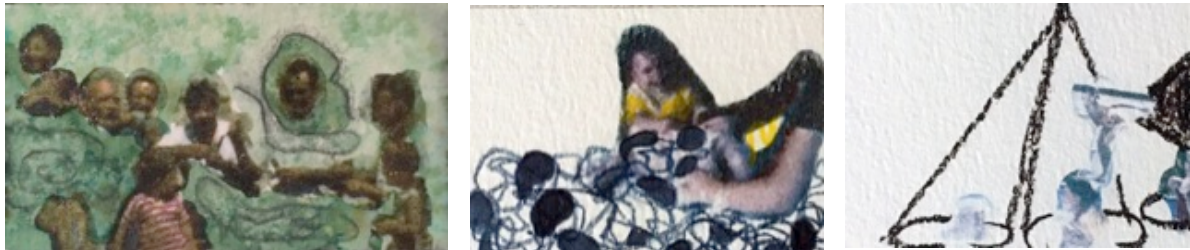
*Fig.11,12*

The second articulation of the line takes the form of an external movement, a vibration of the object with the space it occupies. Figures 13, 14 and 15 show how living and non-living elements attune to their environment through vibrations, depicted as circular/concentric shapes.



*Fig. 13,14,15*

The third articulation of the line is a relational one, not in the sense of ‘becoming attuned’ like in the cases above, but as a deeply shared intertwining of forces. Here, the line reveals the exchanges between the animate and the living, the small and the immense, the near and far. This relational nature of the line is articulated as a structure occupying a space in between or a liminal position, as in Fig. 16, 17 and 18.



*Fig. 16,17,18*

Besides these three articulations there is a fourth nature of the line, that falls in the domain of materiality or matter. Manifest as a scratch across the surface of the image (Fig. 19) or as a grainy trace left by the drawing instrument (Fig. 20) that plays with the level of depth of the image, this nature of the line can be described as a highly sensible and tactile movement giving rise to a new form of palimpsest. The drawing gesture does not enforce the nostalgic aura of the image, like scratches and other kind of physical alterations do, as they thicken the temporal layers of the image. On the contrary, these interventions aim to reach a more profound level, by penetrating the surface of the image and establishing a liminal space that acts as a point of contact between the image and the audience.



*Fig. 19,20*

These drawn gestures – in their spatial and temporal manifestation – deprive forms of their semantic references, representing an analogy to Barthes’ broken signs, in their quality of signifiers without signified. Jean-Luc Nancy points to this capacity of drawing when saying that

the gesture for which drawing offers us the essence and excellence [...] is above all what is most proper to a gesture: an immanent significance, in other words, without the sign taking off toward the signified, but a sense that is offered right at the body that becomes less active, efficient, or operative than the body that gives itself over

to a motion – to an emotion – that receives it, coming from beyond its functional corporeality. (Nancy, 2013, p.39).

In other terms, drawing enables me to see these scenes through another I [eye], to recuperate and hold on to something that was probably never lost, but only forgotten how to be looked at. As such, drawing unfolds a new sense of seeing that does not pre-condition perception, but opens it to the movement of becoming. According to Nancy, the pleasure in drawing lies

in the sensual pleasure of this unfolding, or the pleasure of this unfolding itself inasmuch as it invents, finds, and summons itself further, projected onto the trace that has nevertheless not preceded it. (Nancy, 2013, p.22).

In the context of the Sicilian home movie, drawing, as a gesture guided by the hand, is essential in triggering intuition, or that part of the image that is revealed to us immediately, before embarking on the search for a signified. In fact, after comparing the initial digital explorations of these scenes posted on Tumblr with the hand-drawn experiments involving these scenes, I came to the conclusion that the hand plays a crucial role in drawing out the way we perceive of these images in a way that is more articulate than language. Manual processes enable the individuation of singularity – frames are manipulated one by one and not simultaneously as with Final Cut – and therefore adhere more profoundly to the movement of ideas, thoughts or impressions as they unfold. Drawing by hand gives time to acquire a certain sensibility and facilitates contact with the surface of the image, in order to establish a deeper relation. In contrast, digital manipulation operates at a certain distance, mediated by the computer and algorithmic triggers. Despite generating immediate results, this form of digital intervention tries to synthesize the unfolding of ideas, feelings or thoughts as an overarching impression about the scene. On the other hand, manual interventions such as sketches or doodles point to an unfinished gesture. As a process in becoming, drawing gives rise to a surface of contact between the image and the reader, a sort of visible interface that articulates our relationship to these films. This is also the point I make in the artistic statement of the project, transcribed partly in the opening of this chapter and continuing below:

*In contrast to images that we shoot ourselves, reused home movies undergo another operation, which cannot make ‘tabula rasa’ of what is already present. This quality of the home movie might appear as a limitation, a constraint for whoever deals with it. I believe this is the contrary. I believe it offers more possibilities to make decisions, the freedom to attune and fine-tune our own sensitivity to a superior level of sensitivity. By superior I do not refer to the collective memory of a community, as home movies are highly personal materials that lack the social imprint rendering them collective testimonies. I refer instead to the voicing of an imaginary that is in a process of becoming and therefore able to attune not*

*to a specific physical community but to its projection as a virtual idea, a sort of u-topos (a place that cannot be). It is this power of the u-topos or the impersonal in the home movie - which is the only one we can put our finger on, as the rest represents pure subjectivity - which renders it a valuable instrument for novel creation, a treasure box for the artist and for the everyday audience. In conclusion, perceiving home movies means attuning to this sensitivity. These are works that do not impose a personal perspective but guide the audience, encourage them to reflect as they open new paths of cognition and sensation; they are able to enrich and enlarge an already existing way of seeing. Such a reading of the home movie becomes a mathematic process of addition, where the perceptual operation does not consist in stripping off the images of their original meaning, but in performing a gesture that creates a fissure in their surface and leaves spaces for new possibilities to rise to the fore. On the other hand, this gesture of addition needs to remain imperceptible, in order not to disturb the primordial order of things. We can therefore refer to this addition as an adherence, where contact is possible to form a unitary whole, but where sensitivities remain inseparable from each other. Thus, in dealing with this material, one needs to possess this capacity, this sensitivity and openness to be able to undertake a delicate operation of adherence to the material that opens it up to towards the present. It is as if each layered meaning of the home movie possessed a membrane, a microscopic surface that is pervaded by personal sensitivities, becoming highly receptive to external influences. This surface can be easily influenced and at the same time becomes contagious. Its surface is composed of ideas, ways of seeing, feelings and beliefs that are able to interact with other sensitivities, in such a way as to form a primordial understanding. This is the ultimate freedom offered by the home movie - to wander across boundless imaginaries.*

## 5.4 Conclusions

My experiments highlight the importance of drawing for materialising the invisible space of perception that Mondzain talks about, that membrane or microscopic surface through which the home movie draws the public closer to its universe. In doing so, it promotes new forms of expression of these films that stand at the core of novel modalities of understanding the Sicilian archive insofar as they are positioned closer to our sensorial and embodied approach to the world around us and become therefore more relatable. As an active form of reflexivity, that promotes ‘knowing by doing’, drawing forms part of a different knowledge register than spoken language. As such, these re-drawn and re-composed scenes overcome the barrier of aesthetic muteness (Taylor, 2002) that hinders the translation of aesthetic experiences and judgments into verbal, analytical language. In practical terms, aesthetic muteness refers to my inability to say what attracted me to specific Sicilian home movie scenes in first place. Drawing, in comparison to writing frees us from having to follow a model of analysis. It

disregards intentions or aims and wanders through imaginaries that often give rise to new and unusual associations. More than enriching visual analysis, it extends the capacity to critically reflect on these images and our relationship with them.

This leads me to the conclusion that drawing fills in an important gap as a methodological tool. Drawing becomes a valuable tool for artists and non-artists alike, to explore this process from a deeply reflexive but also critical perspective. This form of drawing becomes a way of re-writing the image, of re-tracing its internal structure in relation to its identity. In this sense, it enables us to ultimately uncover and hold on to something in the Sicilian home movie that we didn't know was initially there. This form of drawing is also distinct from the same creative method deployed in the context of reuse of home movies. When deployed as an intervention aimed at re-positioning the home movie in a creative context (e.g. a new film<sup>25</sup> or an interactive installation) where it gives rise to a work of art, drawing becomes a tool through which the artist searches for a meaningful connection between what is in the image and what lies outside of it. As a research tool, drawing becomes something else. Instead of looking into the capacity of these images to be recontextualised, it tries to highlight the self-reflexive potential of the image. Drawing turns, therefore, inwards to look at the transformative potential of the image in its own right, and not in relation to an external context. As such, it follows the path of 'becoming image' of the home movie.

While this extended way of conceptualising film analysis leads to insightful results in terms of how deep we can go into the exploration of this material, the possibility of adopting drawing as a process to undertake film analysis still poses challenges. First of all, drawing is a time-consuming and highly experimental activity that escapes any attempt of classification (does it fall under technical elements of film analysis, under film format?). As such, integrating it into an existing critical frame, can become difficult. Secondly, drawing does not foreground film knowledge, but intuition and a major degree of attention to detail, giving rise to a relaxed context for its unfolding. Right now, film analysis does not offer this context, insofar as it still receives input data through specialist knowledge. Drawing thus becomes a suitable tool for opening up film analysis to a broader public, one that is not made exclusively of film specialists or researchers. Seen perhaps as a learning and experimentation tool, this methodology could be used to propose more approachable formats for investigating the structure of non-formalised

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<sup>25</sup> Artists such as Bill Morrison and Alina Marazzi whose work I mentioned in the Introduction chapter, but also other artists such as Peter Forgács and Stan Brakhage work mainly with found footage or home movies as re-contextualized material.

film practices such as the home movie. I will talk more about my propositions and potential interventions in this direction, in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

## CHAPTER 6.

### What my body knows: an ethnographic staging of the Sicilian home movie *or* THE EMBODIED MODALITY

“In front of the screen”, Barthes writes, “I am not free to shut my eyes” (Barthes, 1980, p.83). How could we disagree with such a statement? Whether on the computer monitor, the TV screen or the blank wall serving our analogue projection, we are bound to keep our eyes open, to look at the home movie universe unfolding right in front of us. And yet, after having conducted my first drawing experiments with Sicilian home movies, which explore their expressive potential beyond language, I noticed that these images remained vivid in my mind. After shutting down monitors or screens, these scenes kept on lingering somewhere in the back of my mind, continuing to re-emerge in different moments in time, triggered by sensory associations or sensations whose nature I cannot easily explain. I therefore started asking myself if we can look at Sicilian home movies other than through our eyes. Barthes’ statement, enforced by our common sense, suggests this isn’t possible. Yet my experience of the archive and the way I kept on engaging with it and experiencing it, was telling me another story. Moreover, Barthes’ statement kept on fuelling my doubts with regard to the primacy of vision in this process. He continues his statement by saying that “otherwise opening them again I would not discover the same image” (Barthes, 1980, p.83). According to the French philosopher, we are bound to the screen through the power relations that the filmic medium establishes. Considering that much of the critical work on Barthes focused on his resistance to cinema in favour of a fascination for photography (French, 2019 and Watts, 2016), this should not come as a surprise. Yet what has been interpreted as Barthes’ turn away from cinema can also signal a move towards cinema following a non-conventional path, one that searches for a suspension or an excess of meaning in cinema, rather than a definition thereof.

We are able to close our eyes in front of cinema and, when we do so, we perceive reality through a series of frames or images which can alter the way we look at it. My drawing experiments in the first chapter focused on this by printing out single frames composing entire scenes and then recomposing them after intervening through drawing. As such, each frame



became a standalone image that I could apprehend through drawing in a much more reflexive and personal manner than as a series of images in sequence that didn't give me time to reflect upon what was manifesting in front of me. Through this intervention, I could transform the viewing process in such a way that enabled for new interpretations and connections to emerge. In doing so, I followed Barthes' theoretical enquiry for the signifier without a signified (Barthes, 1964). According to Raymond Bellour there are three moments in Barthes' work that speak about the capacity of the moving image to free the signifier from the signified (Bellour, 2001). The first one is in *The Third Meaning* (1973) where Barthes speaks of a third position of the signified to the signifier that is neither denotative nor connotative. The second is in *Pleasure of Text* (1973), where Barthes finds in the aural close-up of cinema a suitable metaphor for the *jouissance* of the text. The third is in *Camera Lucida* (1980), in which Federico Fellini's *Casanova* (1976) creates for Barthes an extravagant evocation. What the French linguist was in fact looking to explore through these concepts is the non-linguistic dimension, the no-signifying or figural power of the moving image, in other words a way to escape from the cinematic medium as a form of submission of the self to the system. Criticising the fact of not being able to shut one's eyes in front of the screen becomes Barthes' protest against a conventional way of looking at film.

What if we stepped back from the screen and went to look for the Sicilian home movie in other places? What if we returned to the same locations where these movies were shot and tried to perceive them through different eyes that enable us not only to see but to feel differently about these films? What kind of practice would this modality call for and what forms of reading of the archive would it give rise to? These were the questions that my first drawing experiments brought to the fore and which I decided to explore more in-depth in the second phase of experiments. In order to define a methodology for this second step, I started with the contextualisation of the process. Going back to the same places in which the Sicilian home movies were shot gives rise to a sort of symbolic re-enactment of these scenes. Even if we do not perform or reconstruct the same gestures of those people appearing in these images, we emotionally and sensorially become an integral part of this highly evocative context. Calling to memory past events, we become contemporary, yet silent, actors of these scenes. Two major elements shape this experience: time and space. The space is a renewed one, a space that bears, in our memory, the marks of the past and becomes familiar through the recognition of a fountain, a building or a simple decorative element that escaped the altering influence of time. Time, on the other hand, becomes a layered notion; a time that is thickened by the emotional

substrata underpinning these locations that links back to the lives of those people appearing in these films and the generations who succeeded them.

This conceptualization of time and space gives rise to a form of ethnographic exploration of the Sicilian home movie, where the immersive capacities of being in place (Pink, 2008) give rise to a different way of looking at and feeling about the home movie. This is a modality that is deeply embodied and looks at the sensible registers of the image that are not depending on us looking at them, but that continue to echo in our minds and bodies long before we have finished watching them. These images become a sort of vivid paintings (Yakup Mohd Rafee Awangko et al., 2015).

In this chapter, I explore how artistic practice transforms my ethnographic exploration of these places (Willim, 2017) and in doing so, gives rise to a mode of practice and self-actualization of reality that shape the way we engage with the Sicilian home movie. More exactly, I experiment during my walks in these places with binaural sound recording<sup>26</sup>, drawing and imaginative writing. I chose these tools because they facilitate a pre-reflective correspondence between the body and the world by providing a means through which to figure out experience, rather than reproducing or representing it (Causey, 2017). Each of these methods constitutes a creative form of decoding sensorial data (audio, visual and cognitive) that makes use of specific affordances to interpret the input, not only recreate it (Pussetti, 2018 and Rutten, 2016). These processes represent bodily approaches to experience that are imaginative enough to capture perception in a holistic way (Hendrickson, 2018). My walks explore a way of knowing the Sicilian home movie archive that is reflective of the position of the body and its capacity of doing, rather than representing (Ingold, 2013). This exploratory form enables us to shut our eyes in front of the screen, only to open them up on a distinct plane of awareness where we can navigate time and space in a non-conventional way. When we do so, we are not able to discover the same images anymore, as Barthes rightfully says, but instead we expect to have them figured out. In the following paragraphs, I analyse in greater depth the results of the creative methods I used and the way they shape an embodied reading of the archive.

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<sup>26</sup> Binaural sound is a method of recording sound that uses two microphones. This fosters a 3D stereo sound sensation for the listener, giving him/her the impression of being in the same room where the events unfold.

## 6.1 Between the body and embodiment, senses and the sensible

During my field trips to the locations where these films were shot, I also stopped in some neighbouring small villages and naturalistic areas. I was not sure if these places had any connection to these films; they could have potentially been used as occasional settings or not. In the case of the Liga family footage, for example, I was able to identify the street corner and even the family's house based on the vivid memory of those images that kept lingering in the back of my mind. On the other hand, many of the depicted scenes have been shot in nature (lemon gardens, countryside, forest etc); these could have very well been located anywhere in the surrounding area of the city. Throughout my walks, I constantly oscillated between the sensation of being 'in place' and being 'emplaced' (Pink, 2015). More specifically, at times I could clearly identify the sensorium that a specific space gave rise to in my body, while in others these sensations were melting in a sort of confusing entanglement between myself, space and the vivid memory of these films.

Those moments, where I was able to visually recognise these places, were distinct from other moments in which I knew I found myself in potential settings of these films, but could not recognise any place. In this latter case, I let myself be guided by the multisensorial experience of that place, where my body played the role of a sensing organism, overcome by curiosity and intrigue, oscillating between sense and reason, visible and invisible, essence and appearance. When I could identify these places, on the other hand, the feeling of *déjà vu* contributed to creating an immersive effect where external sensory stimuli mixed with those stimuli produced by my body. I was suddenly not paying so much attention to the smells, sounds or visual cues that surrounded me; it was as if my body became a sensible map upon which a mix of impressions, memories, sensations played out in a confused and blurred manner. The difference between the sensible and senses is one of localization, as Aristotle says (Aristotle, 350BC). In fact, the sensible lacks in comparison to the senses the possibility of being localized, which renders it highly mobile and holistic as a concept. This nuanced difference in experiencing space made me reflect on the fact that, as Sarah Pink says, our experiences are not only embodied, "but part of a unique environment in progress which both shapes and is shaped by (our) actions" (Pink, 2011, p.344). Alternating between moments of sensible apprehension and moments of sensorial presence in space, my walks were drawing a fine line between notions of embodiment and emplacement.

In order to address better the movement between these two forms of experiencing place (embodiment vs. emplacement), it is helpful to return to Barthes. Although not specifically deploying the concept of embodiment in his work, Barthes wrote extensively about the bodily relation of the reader to the text.<sup>27</sup> With the notion of the pleasure of the text (Barthes, 1974/3), he alludes to the capacity of the reader to refer to a text in a writerly way, rather than a readerly one. A writerly text is an active one that invites the audience to participation, while the readerly text is a more conventionalized and realist object that waits to be consumed, in a culturally determined manner. In the first case, we can speak about texts that present us with a sense of familiarity, traditional interpretation or linear narrative, that conceals through the use of standard interpretations and dominant signifying systems any underlying interpretation. In the second case, we speak about a destabilization of expectations, in which narrative, their meaning and structure do not follow a standard or conventional path. A readerly text thus invites the audience to embody textual ‘writerliness’, to become initiators of a careful and reflective reading (Barthes 1974/3). Returning to the same places where home moviemakers shot these images decades ago, we do not just linger in space. On the contrary, we give rise to a writerly reading of the home movie, in which our body becomes an active interface between us, space and these films. This interface regulates emotions or specific reactions, evokes impressions and re-memorizes fragments of seen material, aimed at a vivid reconstruction of meaning. How are we then able to use our body as an interface to undertake what Barthes calls a writerly reading of the Sicilian home movie? What tools and methods can help us capture this affordance of the body? Drawing on methods from imaginative ethnography (Pratt-Boyden, 2018), I try to envisage creative ways of capturing this nuanced oscillation of the body between sense and sensitivity.

Imaginative ethnography is a relatively new branch of ethnography that integrates methods such as creative arts, digital media, performance and sensory practices into its research methodology (Elliott et al., 2016). These experimental approaches to ethnographic investigation accommodate the concept of embodiment as a way of capturing and describing felt, intuitive

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<sup>27</sup> The text stands for any cultural product, be it a literary text, an image, a play, a film or other genre. Roland Barthes makes a clear distinction between work and text. For Roland Barthes, the work is the definitive object that can be categorized in terms of genre, method, levels of meaning and authorship, and thus represents a commodity. Barthes does not try to fit the definition of the text in a specific analytical frame, but refers to it as “that social space which leaves no language safe, outside, nor any subject of the enunciation in a position as judge, master, analyst, confessor, decoder” (Barthes, 1977, p.164). The passage from work to text represents an evolution from a static notion of perception that is guided by fixed principles and in which the body is a mere passive medium, to a methodological vision of experience in which the body becomes a practice, a means to actively engage with the surrounding world while constructing a sense of reality. We can therefore say that text stands to work like embodiment stands to the body.

and porous bodily experiences (Kesselring, 2015). Deployed methods operate through an amplified sensibility and look at the body not as an object to be studied in relation to culture, but as the subject and sensing self, forming the existential ground of culture. Driven by high levels of openness towards experimentation with sensuousness and sensitivity as relational concepts, creative and imaginative practices represent an experimental frame for this specific ethnographic process (Schäuble, 2016). At the same time, these creative methods avoid binaries and dualities as something given in order to capture lived experience.<sup>28</sup> In doing so, imaginative ethnography works with performance, soundings, pedagogy and graphic practice<sup>29</sup> to open a dialogue about new methods of writing and multisensory, multimedia, and multimodal storytelling.

In my case, this array of methods proves important for trying to make sense of my experience of being, knowing and feeling in place and how this could shape the understanding of Sicilian home movies. What can sound recordings, drawing and writing reveal about experiencing the Sicilian home movie through an ethnographic lens? Are they able to construct a way of reading these films that takes a distance from a predominantly visual modality of reading and gives instead space to a more sensuous and embodied one? These questions become important in a context in which the footage dealt with is framed by temporal and spatial conventions. In fact, my corpus of home movies depicts predominantly Sicilian locations – indoors and outdoors – with some exceptions made by scenes showing vacations in other geographical areas. These films tend to be ordered chronologically, following the thread of the lives of the communities they expose.<sup>30</sup> These spatial and temporal conventions tie the experience of the Sicilian home movie to how we understand things by expecting a specific order of events (marriage – birth of children – birthdays – retirement) and by applying pre-determined cultural filters (we tend to assume that these films are South-Italian from the way people gesticulate, dress or from the landscape<sup>31</sup>). This sort of perception induces the body to act as a receiver of input and stimuli that is filtered through a pre-learned lens. Embodiment and emplacement, on the other hand, open bodily sensations to a more imaginative domain that abandons the culturally framed nature of these films in order to wander through other possible

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<sup>28</sup> For a full description of the aims and principles of imaginative ethnography, please see: <https://imaginative-ethnography.com> and <https://handsonanthropology.org/imaginative-ethnography>.

<sup>29</sup> Professor Carol Hendrickson's exhaustive list of examples of drawing formats used in the context of fieldwork can be accessed here: <https://imaginative-ethnography.com/2016/01/11/new-blog-series/>

<sup>30</sup> Institutional archives, such as the ones in Palermo and Bologna, organize this material chronologically.

<sup>31</sup> Several participants of the workshops developed in the frame of my project guessed the South-Italian origins of these films departing from the aesthetics of the images, the gestures and the filmed context.

spaces and times. These ways of experiencing are not confined to motor and perceptual skills but open up an awareness of the variety of human experiences that arise from a pre-reflective correspondence between the body and the world (Crowther, 1993) and confers upon the body a twofold temporality – being a body vs. having a body (Wherle, 2019). For Merleau-Ponty there is no separation between the sensible and the intelligible (Merleau-Ponty, 2012), but rather a unity of behaviour that expresses the intentionality and thus the meaning of this behaviour. As the body knows how to act, these experiences share the quality of ‘doing without representing’, giving us another kind of access to the world. The co-penetration between perceiving subject and the world turns *perceived* space and time into *lived* space and time, giving rise to a holistic approach to ethnographic investigation (Cunningham et al., 2015). This space and time of the home movie expands beyond the frame of the screen and enters our lives to render us part of their universe. In the following paragraphs, I describe and reflect on my creative experiments undertaken during my ethnographic walks and explore the forms of interaction with these films that they can give rise to.

## 6.2 Sonic landscapes

Home movies are personal or domestic records capturing and preserving fragments of private memory that fall predominantly into the silent film category. Considering they lack sound, these records speak to the public in a different way – they are voiced through their makers, and the families and communities from which they emerge. Sicilian home movies, maybe even more than films from other Italian regions, manage to speak louder and stronger through a liveliness and dynamics of the events that makes gestures speak for themselves. Sicilian and South Mediterranean communities are very dynamic, their members use body language as a means of communication that is many times more eloquent than spoken language. Partly due to the gestural richness of these communities and partly to the expressive power of faces and interactions between people, the lack of soundtrack in these films does not create a disturbing effect during viewing. In fact, when we analyse the corpus of footage from YouTube, we can find only one home moviemaker who added background music in postproduction<sup>32</sup>; this happened probably several years after these images were shot, judging by the tracks added to the images. Representing a rather personal choice, adding lively sound to silent home movies

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<sup>32</sup> This is the case of the home movies belonging to the Mescino family. Source: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MMkHhYb\\_J4&list=PLXfxFKn\\_3PGFttfpaRP6Pf2VHFrhz\\_Xi](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MMkHhYb_J4&list=PLXfxFKn_3PGFttfpaRP6Pf2VHFrhz_Xi)

in postproduction can create an alienating effect, contributing to a loss of the sense of familiarity and intimacy that these images transmit. In fact, a majority of this footage remains unedited, testifying to their natural richness (Berger, 1998). If this is so, then what should the process of recording and adding sound bring to the perceptual process and how could it shape an embodied reading modality of these opuses?

Let us first analyse the reasons behind the lack of sound in these home movies. The corpus of footage identified on YouTube was mainly shot on super8 and 8mm.<sup>33</sup> Although sound on super8 formats is still rare, this is a technical capacity that 8mm film formats did not possess. Assuming that the majority of people owning this technology could also afford to buy the sound-recording equipment, we can speculate that the choice not to record sound was rather a personal one. On the other hand, there is a more practical reason behind the lack of sound in home movies. Families used to share this material with each other during get-togethers and events and very often they commented live different aspects thereof; the lack of sound rendered the dialogue easier as it did not interfere with people's comments. Yet with the passage of the home movie from the family sphere into the public domain of the Internet, this silence stopped being conditioned by the live intervention of the public; reused as archival material or uploaded on social media channels as a way of sharing memories, these films were added music compilations, ambient sounds and other forms of audio registrations. Their evolution represents an analogy to early silent film traditions that prove that cinema was never really silent; from early on, sound accompaniments of films ranged from musical pieces to different mechanical constructs that tried to re-create ambient sounds or specific acoustic signals (Altman, 2004).

In fact, sound is one of the core functionalities in film. We can go as far as saying that sound stands to film like colour to painting. The specificity of the home movie is that even the particular sound made by the projector creates a specific type of ambient experience. In fact, enhancing the experience of a silent home movie by adding this form of sound does not mean that silent films are less important, but underlines the fact that sound is a natural element of the moving image, that contributes above all to a multi-sensorial perception. Ambient sound in home movies, excluding sound added in post-production<sup>34</sup>, refers generally to recordings of site-specific, background sound – either indoors or outdoors – that reproduce the characteristic

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<sup>33</sup> The entire body of YouTube films can be accessed through the interactive documentary: *Spaesi: A poetics of Identity*, accessible through the project website: <http://homemoviesicily.com/index.php/i-doc/>.

<sup>34</sup> For an example of the soundtracks proposed in post-production for home movies, please see: <https://www.discogs.com/No-Artist-Unknown-Artist-Background-Music-And-Sound-Effects-for-Your-Home-Movies/release/10901494> (accessed on 8 July 2020).

sounds of the setting in which these scenes are recorded. Its sources can be identified in natural effects (wind, rain) or man-made ones (voices, mechanical etc). This vernacular sound creates the context for a spatial and atmospheric experience in these films that is evocative of an intimate and personal dimension. At times, ambient sound can appear more as an amalgam of indistinguishable sources, especially when localized further away from the setting or the recording technology is not good enough. Yet its importance for constructing the presence of space in film is undeniable (Marsh, 2019). The distinct and subtle sounds that emanate from an indoor space, for example, enable us to reconstruct a sense of belonging that is different from the sensations that arise from being immersed in a setting such as a busy street. Although ambient sound carries the primary spatial information of film, much of the research attention in sound studies has been directed towards the role of voice and music in relation to the visual image (Chattopadhyay, 2017). In home movies, voice and music become secondary in the face of ambient sounds that dominate the atmosphere. Ambient sound possesses enveloping properties (Dyson 2009, Feld 1990, Sonnenschein 2001, Truax 2008, Tuan 1995) that enforce spatial aspects of perception – the sense of where we are and what is happening around – based on the identification of the source of sound through our bodies. In fact, Frances Dyson affirms that sound is an immersive medium par excellence and that it

returns to the listener the very same qualities that media mediates: that feeling of being here now, of experiencing oneself as engulfed, enveloped, absorbed. (Dyson, 2009, p.4)

In my analysed corpus of YouTube home movies, ambient sound is completely missing, depriving the audience of a more immersive experience. My aim is to recreate this immersive atmosphere by recording ambient sound of the places in which these home movies were originally shot. To this end, I adopt an ethnographic approach as an embodied sensorial experience of place and capture the process through the use of binaural sound. Binaural technology uses two microphones, arranged with the aim of generating a 3D stereo sound sensation for the listener. It recreates a more immersive experience by simulating the sensations that are present in a real-context environment. Compared to stereo sound recording, binaural sound is more suitable to transmit an embodied experience of place. As Tom Jackson underlines:

field recordings made using ‘standard’ stereo microphones may be limited in their capacity to communicate embodied sensory experiences, as the technologies used in their creation bear little resemblance to human auditory perception. It is here that



binaural field recording has the potential to make a significant contribution to ethnographic methods. (Jackson, 2018, p.75)

As one of the latest advancements in digital recording technology, binaural sound enables us to not only record and re-present a deep layer of low-frequency sounds (Kerins, 2011), but also contributes to a heightened sense of space and embodiment (Chattopadhyay 2017, Jackson 2018) that is nevertheless perceived only when the recordings are listened to through headphones. Binaural sound blurs the boundaries between reality and simulation by opening senses towards a greater sensibility of perception. The binaural sound which I recorded, while walking through the streets of these small towns, mirrors a broad range of tonalities and pitches. It captures a broad range of noises from high-pitch sounds in the traffic to the lower-frequency content, appearing as rumbles or mixed noises emerging from behind the walls of houses.

The recording process in itself is a highly intimate and embodied one. First of all, the act of reminiscing about the families and people who used to live in these small towns, while listening to the sounds, smells and perceiving the colours that invest my senses, produces a feeling of emplacement, of strangely belonging to a space in a more meaningful manner than being a simple passer-by. This emotional state rendered me more receptive to outside stimuli, to which I would probably not have reacted in other circumstances. Additionally, the microphones magnified my perception and reaction to sounds, turning my body into a subtle receiver of signals, able to capture even small movements in the environment. In fact, several times during my walks, I had the impression of hearing what people were doing behind the walls of their houses, which is a very strange feeling indeed. Other times instead, this heightened state of perceptual apprehension was altered by the high-pitched sounds in the traffic or even the wind. The embodied approach of these ethnographic walks goes beyond a simple reconstruction of the architectural space in which these home movies were set. Nor is this approach aimed at the reconstruction of a diegetic space of these films. More than anything else, these walks and recordings provide a sense of apprehension and an awareness that goes beyond the perceptual experience provided when watching these films.

By adding the recorded sound to the original films, I am able to build a consistent part of this experience into the image. The aim of this process is not to produce a sound work through an artistic intervention or transformation of the site, but rather a mirroring of a more holistic experience of emplacement that overlaps with the original setting of these films. Maybe

the most eloquent case is the footage belonging to the Niosi family.<sup>35</sup> During my walks in this family's small hometown in the province of Messina, I captured a variety of local sounds ranging from the voices of people in their own domestic space, to talks on the streets between unknown people, children's play on the street, traffic noise and many other variations and combinations of urban events.<sup>36</sup> This led to the creation of an audio-piece that reflected a variety of circumstances, yet was never too explicit or contextual as to have to cut out and replace significant parts of it. In fact, when I started editing the original montage of selected scenes, the process of adding soundtrack from my recordings, did not produce a disturbing or mismatched effect. On the contrary, the subtle atmosphere that it generated, fitted very well the visual context of these films. This resulting universe, which is a constructed space, brings back the site into the images, not by transforming it creatively, but by mirroring the holistic experience of emplacement. The sense of verisimilitude is thus not meant to generate a mimetic space (a simulation of a real space) but rather to create an imaginary one, in which the recording process tries to reflect the perceptual experience of feeling and being in the same place where these scenes were filmed. According to media researcher Budhaditya Chattopadhyay, constructed media spaces of this sort are effective, "when resonance of the site reverberates in our ears and to our sonic sensibilities even long after the medial experience" (Chattopadhyay, 2017, p.2). The result of adding binaural sound to the original home movie leads to the formulation of a constructed world that continues to reverberate not only in our ears but throughout our entire being, insofar as it invests holistically the body. This way of re-living space through binaural sound recording gives rise to a modality of engagement with the Sicilian home movie that extends beyond sensory perception. As an almost imperceptible and natural element of the image – the importance of sound is often taken for granted in film – recorded sound affects the mood of the audience, without them noticing it. In the case of editing selected scenes, mixing sounds of the present with images of the past give rise to a layered structure of the image.<sup>37</sup> The result is apparently invisible – the viewer is not able to easily distinguish that sound was recorded much after the images. Yet it contributes to thickening time and space beyond a linear unfolding. This creative form of using sound gives rise to an emplaced

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<sup>35</sup> The footage belonging to the Niosi family is not uploaded on YouTube. The owner sent me his family footage from the United States, where he currently lives with his family. This material is made available through the interactive documentary *Spaesi: A poetics of Identity*, uploaded on the project website.

<sup>36</sup> The ambient recordings at Fiumedinisi, the Niosi's family hometown, can be accessed at: <https://amateur-broken-signs.tumblr.com/post/623181314706833408/fiumedinisi-binaural-recording>.

<sup>37</sup> This material can be accessed through the interactive documentary *Spaesi: A poetics of Identity*: <http://homemoviesicily.com/index.php/i-doc/>.

imagination, positioned at the intersection of representation, reconfiguration and description of space. Instead of conveying meaning or generating metaphorical or symbolic references to these places, these edited scenes call naturally upon our awareness of space, by letting it penetrate our senses and melt slowly into our bodies. These experiments can potentially offer new forms of experiencing the home movie archive, but also propose physical formats for people who want to discover these locations from an original stance. Before talking more about these possibilities, I will explore a second form of engagement with space: through drawing and writing as an orchestrated process for landmark investigation.

### 6.3 Somatic postcards

While passing through the same streets that some decades ago Sicilian home moviemakers tried to capture, I sometimes came upon specific places that encouraged me to set my recordings aside and just dwell in the landscape unravelling before me. The nature of this place varied so much that I could not see a clear pattern in my behaviour. I stopped before a bench at the end of a narrow street opening towards the sea, the view of a strange building that I could see while sitting on the stairs of a church, a chat between friends that I witnessed while sitting at the table of a bar's terrace, the green scenery of a hilly naturalistic reserve and an exotic park whose dense vegetation offered shadowed glimpses of the sea. What I knew in these cases is that I was suddenly finding myself in spaces that heightened my bodily awareness; it was as if I found myself physically and sensorially immersed in space, while also harmonising with it. Inside this scenery, my body guided my gestures. As my body started being flooded by sensations and ideas began synthetizing, I took up writing and drawing (see Fig. 21).



*Fig. 21: field research drawings*

As specific forms of performative and embodied acts, drawing and writing helped me to make sense of my bodily stance. In contrast to recording sound or filming these places, which are more direct forms of mediation, drawing and writing brought out the essence of lived experience through the immediacy of imaginative practice. Imagination is a phenomenon that involves the entire human sensorium, able to capture lived experience as a holistic process. Mark Harris and Nigel Rapport highlight the individual agency and practice of imagination, recognizing that it is “foundational of our physical dwelling within environments and our intellectual-cum-emotional appreciation of them” (Rapport, 2015, p.20). As a personal and embodied capacity, imagination impacts on the material world, shaping it according to one’s personal sensorium. As a combined practice, drawing and writing engaged with my senses as these translated lived experience into aesthetic forms. In fact, when looking at the produced drawings, two things stand out: the use of colour and the symbolic-like figurative elements.

Although we can still distinguish objects and shapes in these drawings, they represent snapshots of a reality that do not follow the lines and colours of the appearance of objects, but rather those of the vibrations that these acquire, as they are reflected in imagination. Drawing proceeds loosely, without paying attention to reproducing details. The image of the orange building in the right upper corner of Fig.21, for example, appears as if the colours have flown one into another, giving rise to a dreamy atmosphere. In the bottom picture depicting a view of the sea from under some trees, there is an excess of colour pigment that renders the atmosphere very vivid, almost painfully coloured for the eyes. The vertical image, representing the terrace

of the bar I sat at, depicts a narrow street between buildings. The street does not follow the rules of perspective in the pictorial space, but rises towards the sky in a vertical manner; there is use of colour in the depiction of the street lines that reflects a dynamic movement of the hand and thus creates a blurry sensation. This manner of instinctive drawing is a process that deals with matter and materiality as it forms into specific vocabularies through which these images speak to the viewer. These images are about air and light, about the ways in which concrete objects deliquesce into sense data. In this sense, they are opposed to landscape drawing or travel drawings, which were considered fashionable a few centuries ago during what was known as the Grand Tour.<sup>38</sup>

Text accompanies these drawings as a way of anchoring colour into the pictorial space. It does not have an explanatory role of the image; it rather evokes the rhythm and style of the drawing gesture. The small texts that I produced combined reflections on the social and cultural identity of these places with more abstract ideas, unfolding from an induced emotional state of emplacement. Each text revolves around a central element or theme: resistance, uplifting, colours, encounters. Mixing facts inspired from the social and cultural reality of the visited place with imaginary and sensorial impressions deriving from my affective experience, I produced brief texts at the intersection of fiction and reality. The following text is an excerpt thereof:

Casual encounters are those events that lack a preparatory structure and a pre-established organisation. They succeed other smaller happenings that collide to form a bigger and more significative event. The force of this encounter is given by the power of togetherness, yet for which the sum of single forces does not equal the power of the final event. Casualty resides in this union; this is an elementary union yet at the same time a highly complex one. We cannot set any rule or pattern for how these encounters take place, as we cannot foresee any ending or conclusion. Casual encounters are important for their uncontrollable value and the invisible traces they leave in the depths of our being. (Lupu, 2019)

I wrote this text for Alia, one of the hometowns of the home movie owners and important cultural and anthropological centre in the province of Palermo. The unique characteristic of this village of little more than 3.000 inhabitants is its location. Positioned on the top of a hill, the village offers a view of both Mount Etna and the Eolian islands, representing an encounter

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<sup>38</sup> The Gran Tour was the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century custom of undertaking an educational trip through Europe, performed by upper-class young European men. This trip was associated with a standard itinerary, and many times, aspiring artists undertaking them would train themselves in landscape painting or sculpture.

of territories, of archaic culture and mystery. In fact, at only 5km from the village centre, we can find the Gurfa Caves, an example of rock architecture dating back 5.000BC. Alia is a result of geological and mysterious encounters, which positions it between the past and the present. As the only Sicilian village with no peripheries but only gardens, Alia is the perfect example of a space of encounters, whose origins is suspended between the imagined and the real. Adding up to my drawings, this text aims to establish a dialogue with space that is nevertheless different from the graphic novel or the comic book– both formats are generally deployed as formats for presenting ethnographic findings. In these formats, image and text have a functional unity insofar as they complement each other. In my case, the established model is not one of correspondence, but of intersection.

Organised as a dialogue between generic spaces captured by somatic modes of attention and the representation of thought that anchors lived experience in language, this modality of organising image and text resembles a postcard. As the perfect example of popular art and an ephemeral cultural artefact, this form of textual imagery is a vivid pictorial journey through lived experience. The specificity of the postcard relies in its historical tendency<sup>39</sup> to reproduce landscapes and scenes that fix the collective imagination into a sort of eternal scenario. As simple and effective means of correspondence exchange, postcards merge a short message with a specific illustration of a place, usually a landmark or monument. Sometimes the combination of text and image is more artistic, such as the case of the postcards published by the Bamforth company that featured illustrated scenes along with single verses from poems or hymns.<sup>40</sup> The process of individualising these landmarks and transforming the text from a personal message into a more reflexive statement, completely transforms the functionality of these objects.

In our case, nevertheless, the postcard turns from a mass-produced object into a highly personal one, where the spatial and temporal dimensions are interiorised rather than rendered public and serial. Not only the functionality but also the form of engagement with the postcard changes. Instead of compiling a pre-existing one, we become active producers of postcards. This ‘reformulation’ of the postal performs a double shift. The first passage takes place from the standard mass-produced object found in libraries and post offices to a more personalised format. Such a contemporary format is offered through digital platforms such as Instagram where users, finding themselves in a tourist spot, can portray the moment of their passage

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<sup>39</sup> The historical importance of the postcard also has a deep connection to silent cinema. Films stills extracted from silent films were very popular subjects during the 1900s for postcards. The Bamforth company, for example, began as a photographic shop, then moved into making films and ultimately passed to publishing postcards in the 1990s.

<sup>40</sup> Source: <https://imfromyorkshire.uk.com/bamforth-co-ltd-made-yorkshire-volume-26/> retrieved on 6 July 2020

through this landscape and make it available online in the same manner that the postcard made it possible. This first transformation turns what was once time-based and perennial in a postcard into something that is present and episodic, such as the case of the four images of San Paolo analysed by Dirce Vasconcellos Lopes and Pedro Henrique Cremonez Rosa (Vasconcellos et al., 2014). The second shift regards the communicative function of the postcard. Instead of delivering information *about* a landmark, the new, hand-drawn format communicates *with* space, transporting it towards a more imaginary and personal domain. Through drawing, which is a deeply emotional and sensuous process, but also a spontaneous and immediate one, the person engages in a dialogue with space. If the message of the traditional postcard can be read as: ‘I have been here’, the one corresponding to these somatic formats becomes: ‘I have felt in-place’. The core characteristic of this postcard format is that it does not communicate something to someone else (friends or other people), but internalises this dialogue with space. The text corresponding to these images does not sublimate, patheticize or rationalise the image, as Barthes affirms (Barthes, 1977). Substituting photographs of places with drawings, we pass from what Susan Sontag defines as a “chronic voyeuristic relation to the world which levels the meaning of all events” (Sontag, 2001, p.11) to a highly introspective and active participatory gesture in the creation of our own reality. This form of postcard fixes somatic experience into the contours of the image, turning it into more than a reflection of reality. In doing so, the postcard not only proclaims the tourist's acquisition of experience (Sontag, 2001), but gives it a deeper meaning. The relevance and novelty of a somatic postcard for the interpretation of the Sicilian home movie resides in the non-linear reading of time and space. These dimensions acquire an intimate connotation that is lived on a different plain of consciousness than that of the photographic image. Somatic postcards can give rise to a new grammar of seeing that is reflective of the ‘here’ and the ‘now’, but at the same time bears the echoes of a memorized past.

### 6.3 Conclusions

Returning to the physical places where these films were shot is similar to finding oneself on the shooting location of a favourite movie. There is nothing similar to the lived experience and vivid imagination connected to the sensation of being in-place. Lived experience brings to life those scenes and the people depicted in them, which we store in our memory and carry around with us. From this perspective, the process is akin to re-photography<sup>41</sup>, only that instead of reproducing space visually, we trace space through the lens of our own bodies and inscribe the emerging impressions into a visible space offered by the creative medium that we selected. Yet compared to a commercial movie, where we know that what we re-live is staged, in the case of the home movie these sensations and impressions are heightened by the realisation that what we experience *is* or at least *was* real. Memory plays a crucial role in this context, as it enables us to make sensations, ideas and feelings re-surface. More than looking into forms of ritualised memory practices that these films convey<sup>42</sup>, memory turns into a valuable tool for exploring expressive possibilities that the audience can use as active participators of the reading of the archive. Those people, whose vivid black and white or grainy coloured images resurface in our memory, embody the image of a time that, although gone, persists in haunting these spaces in the present moment. This awareness is an embodied one. As the body becomes the point of contact between the intangible (our imagination and memory) and the tangible (the places surrounding us), it blurs the limits between past and present. What *is* and *was* find a common denominator in the body as the bearer of materialised memories.

Sonic landscapes and somatic postcards reconstruct a vivid pictorial journey through the Sicilian home movie based on a sense of being-in-place. They enable a reading that is fully present through the body as a mediator and initiator of experience. As such, binaural sound recording can be used to propose new digital and physical itineraries of exploration of the Sicilian archive. People can become active participants in recreating sonic spaces as echoes of these films or just listen to them by using a set of headphones while navigating the virtual archive. On the other hands, somatic postcards can become a contemporary practice of visiting

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<sup>41</sup> Re-photography is a process of combining two photographs taken of the same place but at different times, that tries to keep the same angle of the shot. As such, the overlapping of these two images serves as a way of showing evidence of the change through which the depicted location underwent.

<sup>42</sup>The project 'Changing platforms of ritualized memory practices. The cultural dynamics of home movies' (2012-2015), dealt with the interrelationship between technology, user generations and spaces of memory production in the home movie making and screening. The project, looked specifically at how technologies shaped new practices and rituals of memory staging. More information about the project can be found here: <https://homemoviesproject.wordpress.com/about/>



settings of home movies. Such itineraries are made of a different sort of landmarks, that cannot be industrially reproduced but only individually crafted. By connecting a scene to its setting, visitors can be invited to experience these films by acting *in* and *upon* place, instead of being passive testimonies to the fragments of memories inscribed on these reels. I will talk more in detail about these possibilities in the final chapter of my thesis. At this point it is worth mentioning the importance of both binaural recording and the postcard format to build a new grammar of seeing the Sicilian home movie. In a contemporary context, in which everything that was once directly lived is now mediated, replaced by a representation (Debord, 1994), these methods operate as practices of restoration. They restore a lost dimension of place and time that is more genuine and personal; this dimension is the one that we are unconsciously searching for in these home movie images, each time we open them. Such practices become a form of resistance to the decay of the home movie image that does not refer to the corrosions on the surface of film, but rather to the dissolution of those intimate universes in the passage of time and altering of space.

# CHAPTER 7.

## Knowing together: co-creating the Sicilian home movie experience *or* THE AFFECTIVE MODALITY

Up to this point in my project, I have explored ways to look at and engage with the Sicilian corpus of home movies from the perspective of the relationship established between the viewer and the footage. While artistic practice uncovered an interesting potential to shift the ways we traditionally engage with these films, by transforming visual and ethnographic methods of investigation, this potential is still based on experiments carried out at an individual level. What about the interaction potential of these films with entire groups of audiences? How are these able to relate collectively to this material and what forms of exploration of these films do they give rise to?

The purpose of the last phase of investigation of my project is to tap deeper into how the collective imaginary is able to give rise to new practices of reading the Sicilian home movie. In doing so, it undertakes a gradual experimentation with creative exercises around notions of affect in Sicilian home movies that progresses from an individual to a collective level. To this end, I explore how my own creative practice enables me to affectively engage with selected scenes of home movies and how through these results I can formulate and test a participatory process that extends at the level of communities. More precisely, this last step aims to explore co-creation practices with groups of social researchers and creative practitioners who, although not operating in the field of home movies, possess the practical set of skills and knowledge to find new ways of engaging with these films. Co-designing looser approaches for engaging with Sicilian collections of home movies is ultimately important to foster novel audience engagement strategies. I chose not to involve directly groups of non-specialists such as local communities, as I wanted to move away from the sentimentalist and stereotyped emotional lens that people tend to attach to these films. Communities of practitioners on the other hand are better suited to test these methods. These people possess a grounded approach that renders them aware of the stereotyped lens through which these films tend to be looked at, but at the same time they are not constrained by standard theories that frame these movies. In order to better understand how I developed this process, I first need to address the social nature of the home movie and how this opens collective possibilities of engagement with these films.

The home movie has always been a social object. From the moment it was created, the home movie experience was shared with the entire community. In fact, these films usually brought together family members with the intent of watching and commenting on these materials and the memories that they conveyed. It was only through the passage of these films to the public domain that an individual engagement with these films started prevailing; people started exploring this material for their own research aims and artists engaged with it for creative purposes. Nevertheless, the case of the *Home Movie Day* events and other grassroots and community projects, discussed in the Introduction, show a growing interest in collective forms of engagement with these materials. The workshops organised by *Home Movies Bologna* and *Museo del Mare* in Palermo, for example, mentioned also in the Introduction, point at how home movies can use collective experience of the archive to draw out interesting reflections upon aspects of space, time and memory. While these interventions prioritise the media-related aspects of the home movie, they still constitute examples of how these films can work from a community perspective. As such, they become interesting promotional tools for institutional archives, museums or cultural institutions wishing to engage their community in meaningful experiences. The last phase of my exploration aims to go a step further. Its purpose is to explore how such workshop formats can be re-designed to reflect not only upon media aspects or contemporary social and cultural challenges, but also on the potential of these films to build communities around them by relying on their affective nature.

The process of this last stage builds on the assumption that the home movie is by nature an affective object. Artists and filmmakers working with this material often point to the capacity of the home movie to evoke sensations and give rise to strong emotions.<sup>43</sup> Researchers alike have dealt with the notion of affect in home movies. Among these studies (Odin, 2017 and Ishizuka et al. 2008), Kaja Silverman's reflection on this aspect is maybe the most poignant one. Silverman points, in an unreferenced essay, quoted by Ernst van Alphen, to the private and affective dimension of these images, which are "first of all achieved with the many direct looks with which people face the camera" (Silverman in Van Alphen, 2004). Silverman underlines the fact that by establishing a direct contact with the viewer, this gesture is not simply self-reflective, as in a fiction movie, but becomes intimate and manages to short-circuit the fictionality of the film. The home movie is thus able to establish an emotional interaction with the audience despite the anonymity of its characters and the private nature of the events

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<sup>43</sup> In the 11 interviews that I conducted with artists and filmmakers reusing home movies, the affective nature of this footage was brought up several times. For further details, please see the full transcripts on the project website.

that it depicts. Yet while our emotions arise in our bodies, they are rooted in something deeper that emerges from a moment of unformed and unstructured potential. This potential is called affect.

In philosophy, affect, emotion and feelings are not synonymous. When we compare affect to feelings and emotions, it is revealed as the most abstract of the three terms. If emotions are the projection of feelings, and feelings represent identified and labelled sensations, affect comes before both of them. As such, affect cannot be fully realised in language, representing the body's way of preparing itself for action in a certain context by adding a dimension of intensity to experience. Affect marks a flow of vibrations that precede any concrete form of sensation or impression.

For a better comprehension of the concept, we must go back to its philosophical origins in Baruch Spinoza, who defined affect as a state of mind and the body that is close to feelings and emotions, but does not overlap with these (Spinoza, 1677). Both Henri Bergson, and later, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari build on Spinoza's definition of *affect* as an intangible state and of *affection* as that which relates to the body<sup>44</sup>, in order to conceptualise affect as a capacity – to affect and be affected – or a pre-personal intensity that relates to the passage from one state of the body to the other, that implies an augmentation or diminution of its capacity to act (Deleuze et al., 1987, p. xvi). This form of affect is a dynamic one, marking the passage from an embodied position to another. In fact, the Canadian philosopher and translator of Deleuze and Guattari's work, Brian Massumi, further defines affect as a “nonsignifying, nonconscious experience of intensity” (Massumi, 1995, p.30).

In my project, I depart from Bergson's understanding of affection as an internalised state, to then pass to Deleuze's and Guattari's definition of affect as a relational capacity and its further conceptualisation through Massumi. Doing so enables me to first unpack the mechanisms of affect through which the home movie operates, and then to refer to its external and relational capacity. The importance of this understanding of affect for the project lies in its relation to the body that, according to Massumi, “doesn't just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations, but rather infolds contexts. It infolds volitions and cognitions that are nothing if not situated” (Massumi, 1995, p. 30). As such, affect presupposes a movement or a flow that determines the relation between our own selves, the others and the environment. Without affect, it would not be possible to assess experience. Without affect, our cognitive capacity

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<sup>44</sup> Baruch Spinoza clearly states: “by affect I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections” (Spinoza, 1994 p. 154).

would not apprehend the films that unfold before our eyes. Especially in the context of the home movie, it is important to distinguish affect from emotion. We usually deal with articulations of our emotions in relation to these films (e.g. the joy, nostalgia, sadness that these films foster) that give rise to a form-content or object-subject relationship. We rarely try to take into account the affective potential of these films; although many times, we tend to confuse our emotions with the underlying affect that pervades our relation to these images. Affect is a diffused sensation. It generates an immersive experience of the home movie, yet it does not fix sensation in our bodies. According to Martin Bressani, affect is a dynamic reality, it is “immanent, a general tonality that enfolds people and things at a given place, at a given time; it constitutes the world as lived reality” (Bressani, 2010, p.161). As a non-subjective and pre-individual reality, affect draws the contours of a renewed perceptual capacity of these films. An affective apprehension of the home movie brings to light a dynamic perspective that partakes of the mood and atmosphere unravelling in these films, which represent the core mechanisms through which home movies connect with the public.

While affect brings out the *lived* experience of these films, it also dissolves in it, leaving us with the incapacity to fully represent it. While looking at these films, affect deteriorates, vanishes and reappears, managing to shape our perception of them, but always escaping expression. Nigel Thrift theorises affect as a force conceptualising the world in a non-representational manner (Thrift, 2007). Insofar as it represents a primordial state of becoming of experience, affect moves towards a different form of perception that goes through the body and the eyes, not as perceptual organs that react to an external stimulus, but rather as medium that interacts with a given context in order to adapt to change. Conceptualising such a form of seeing is, of course, difficult. Language is the more natural and easy way we have to communicate about these films and affect goes normally through our capacity to verbally manifest our sensations. Going beyond it can become problematic insofar as we need to let go of habits and ways of perceiving things that are schematic and therefore based on experience and learning patterns. Attempting to do so means we need to be able to ‘tell’ what ‘moves us’ about these films, without necessarily trying to collapse it into meaning.

Maybe the best way to explain this nascent process of affective interaction with the home movie is through Roland Barthes’ notion of *punctum* (Barthes, 1981). For Barthes, the punctum denotes that extra value of the photograph that gives rise to its specific aura or the atmosphere that cannot be attributed neither to the photographer nor to the medium. The punctum is that something which lies in-between and therefore cannot be really defined.

Barthes insists that the punctum can be applied only to the image as it denotes an affect that becomes possible only when we have the time to contemplate the image and, in films, we do not have this privilege. On the other hand, artists like Peter Forgács who work with moving images, advocate for the vitality, for the flux of life preserved on film (Szabados et al., 2011) that constitutes the real punctum. One way or another, the punctum remains a very good concept to explain the forming process of affective interaction of the audience with the home movie.

Returning to the gesture of people looking directly into the camera, mentioned by Silverman when discussing Forgács' work, we become aware that the punctum of the home movie builds on such informal codes of conduct. In fact, Daniel Albright considers that silent movies represent ambitious codebooks which shape our ability to read emotional content through a specific vocabulary: that of gestures (Albright, 2014). This is even more relevant for Sicilian home movies that convey a specific sense of corporeal presence through their gestural aesthetic.<sup>45</sup> The liveliness and corporeality that characterise this language are essential for decoding its intimate vocabulary. On the one hand, these codes of conduct are structured according to a cultural and ethnographic logic, that leads us to interpret certain gestures as habits, attitudes or social happenings. On the other hand, these films lack editing, which means the intent of the home moviemaker is expressed directly through in-camera editing: pans, sudden switches between situations and contexts etc. The home movie does not undergo a process of montage, which was, according to the Soviet Montage Theory movement, the main mechanism of film language (Bordwell, 1972). Lev Kuleshov's experiments with archival footage and close-up of faces, that were part of this movement, aimed at affirming the power of montage as an aesthetic whole that represents more than the sum of its parts i.e. single shots. Albright, for example, sees these experiments as an attempt to make a point about "emotional leakage from one element of a montage into another" (Albright 2014, p. 154). With montage being replaced in the case of the home movie by in-camera editing, how does this emotional leakage take place then?

A closer look at the difference between montage and in-camera editing indicates a shift from a *learned* way of looking at these films to a more intuitive and immediate one. The commercial film industry has taught us to interpret images based on how they are cut,

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<sup>45</sup> In fact, gestures are not only folklore, they build a peculiar codified language for the Sicilian culture. The Italian filmmaker Luca Vullo explores in his documentary, *The Voice Of The Body* (2011), how refined this codified language actually is. He presented his research at Oxford, Cambridge, National Theatre and BBC. Source: [https://video.corriere.it/cosi-spiego-inglesi-linguaggio-gesti-noi-siciliani/bf9accb0-9163-11e6-ac33-c191fa0a3477?refresh\\_ce-cp](https://video.corriere.it/cosi-spiego-inglesi-linguaggio-gesti-noi-siciliani/bf9accb0-9163-11e6-ac33-c191fa0a3477?refresh_ce-cp) retrieved on 7 June 2020

associated and assembled in order to obtain a certain effect. Through this lens, we look at unedited home movie scenes as unorganised or chaotic and therefore as rather inferior compared to more commercial products. Nevertheless, what these scenes manage to do is to let contexts and situations unfold through a natural rhythm and flow of gestures. In-camera editing collates events one after the other as they take place; in these films, everything that happens is recorded and cannot escape the filming process. This form of *raw* filmic material conveys to the viewer a distinct dimension of time. In this context, affect does not *leak* from one scene to the other like in montage. Instead, it *flows* from one body to the other – I use here ‘body’ not only as a physical entity, but as a holistic being or sensing-self, that is involved in the viewing experience. This flow, or movement of intensity, blurs the lines between the environment, the perceived object and our own selves, turning to a way of seeing that is bodily *and* affective at the same time.

Exploring informal gestures and in-camera editing as indications of the punctum in Sicilian home movies uncovers how these films work affectively in relation to the communities that make use of them. Departing from affect’s pre-personal and non-representational nature, I aim to make sense of these films through a controlled yet unlearned and participatory approach. I therefore follow a three-step process. In a first instance I look at in-camera editing as the core affective mechanism of the home movie. By stepping into the footsteps of the home moviemaker, I then engage in the editing process, in which the eye looks for patterns of recurrences from which to construct a vocabulary of affect. This leads me to collating shots from selected home movie scenes and from my own recorded images. In this process, I intentionally do not use montage to cut and edit fragments of these films. Instead, I position these scenes in a random order without any intervention of modification or adaptation. By performing these steps, my aim is to investigate the specificity of in-camera editing as an affective medium through which the home movie speaks to its audience.

In a second phase, I look at the role of the body in this affective context. Representing both a faculty through which we make sense of experience and a medium reflecting the significance of experience (Thrift, 2007), the body demonstrates its capacity to affect and be affected by these films. In my exploration of the affective body, I produce a cotton garment that I hand-print with selected stills from my corpus of footage and finalise through drawing directly on the textile. This form of collage on textile captures the performed affectivity of the home movie in relation to its public. The garment becomes more than a simple decorative object; operating as an interface between our bodies and the film, the garment turns into an

element of embodied affectivity, a sort of sensuous map upon which we inscribe our relation to these films.

Moving beyond the notion of affect as an embodied performativity, I ultimately turn my attention to affect as a movement, able to circulate between bodies. I therefore look at how people are able to co-create affective representations of this footage by using, as a guiding principle, Deleuze's concept of affection-image (Deleuze, 2013) that I will discuss later on. To this end, I organise in the frame of the Cracking the Established Order (Leicester, UK) and Innovate Heritage (Catanzaro, Italy) two co-creative workshops where participants *perform* together a shared way of looking at these films that uses the notion of affect. Using different creative exercises inspired by my first two experiments, these workshops facilitate an encounter with the Sicilian home movie that builds on the capacity to *think* and *feel* together.

The entire process represents a three-phased iterative cycle in which I test my own creative practice against critical theory, and then use the results to formulate creative exercises for participatory processes that make use of Sicilian home movies. This last phase, that opens up the co-creative process to communities of researchers and artists who are not usually working with these films, is indicative of the potential strategies that can be used in the future with a much broader and less specialised public. Participatory workshops are not only concrete actions for testing new ways of opening up the Sicilian home movie archive to different modalities of understanding. Above all, they enable me to test formats and formulas of working with these materials in real-case environments and can therefore show clearly if and how these constructs or reading modalities can work in practice. As such, these workshops raise an important question: are we able to develop new ways of knowing the Sicilian home movie that are participative and thus testify to their social nature, or are these films too distant from us in order to be able to look at them through a renewed lens? I hope to be able to answer through these workshops this question around the social use of the Sicilian archive. These co-creative experiments round off my explorations with reading modalities that can empower people to construct their own narrative of the Sicilian home movie archive that are positioned halfway between disciplinary studies and community-led directions. I gathered the results of these experiments in an interactive documentary called *Spaesi: a poetics of identity*, to which I will refer in the conclusions of my thesis. This chapter is structured in three main parts, each exploring a step of the iterative process I went through, to explore affective reading modalities of the archive.



## 7.1 Affective medium

The home movie operates through an affective process. This means that the way it is built favours our affective engagement with it. But where should we start looking for the signs of this affect-enabling infrastructure of the home movie? We have seen that Barthes' punctum and the gestural in the home movie provide a good point of departure. This theory supposes that affect is neither internal nor external to the film but positioned somewhere in between. Bergson's definition of affect, as "that part or aspect of the inside of our bodies which mix with the image of external bodies" (Bergson, 1990, p.60) does not reflect this liminal position of affect. Yet despite describing affect as something internal, Bergson adds that affect "comprises an element irreducible to representation properly so called; it contains a subjective and 'impressionist' content, impossible to analyse or describe, which can only be experienced and sensed" (Bergson, 1990, p. 498-9). Access to the immediate and non-representational demands a specific kind of effort and attention, insofar as "the immediate is far from being that which is easier to notice" (Bergson, 1972, p.148). Bergson calls this effort intuition. For the French philosopher, to intuit an object requires an effort to sympathise with it, to note its movement. In this specific movement lies affect.

At this point, the concept of sympathy becomes interesting for our liminal interpretation of the notion of affect. According to David Lapoujade, the externalisation of intuition is achieved through sympathy (Lapoujade, 2008). His article, 'Intuition and sympathy in Bergson' (2008), draws extensively on the difference that Bergson makes between the two concepts. In his view, Bergson looks at intuition as a form of interiority that reflects upon itself (Bergson, 1990) and can difficultly reach a reality out of itself. Sympathy is, instead, that by which we transport ourselves inside an object to coincide with what is unique and therefore impossible to express (Bergson, 1938). This capacity of *sympathising with* can very well explain the liminal position of affect. Moreover, sympathising with or intuiting something, is according to Bergson, a slow process:

you don't get intuition from reality, that is to say a spiritual sympathy with its interiority, if one has not won its trust through a long fellowship with his external manifestations. And it's not just about assimilating the highlights; it is necessary to accumulate and melt together such an enormous mass that one is assured, in this fusion, of neutralizing one by the other all the preconceived and premature ideas

that observers may have unwittingly placed without noticing it at the core of their observations. (Bergson, 1990, p.226)



*Fig.22: Stills from selected video*

According to Bergson, sympathy is that jump, that opening of intuition towards external reality that goes beyond preconceived ideas. Sympathising with Sicilian home movies means thus trying to understand and attune to their affective nature. This process requires time; as Bergson says, time neutralizes all other preconceived and premature ideas that inhibit intuition. To think, therefore, affectively is to think in terms of duration, to take the necessary time to get used to its aesthetics, to the recurrences or patterns that pervade this specific home-made modality of recording everyday life. Moreover, attuning to the Sicilian home movie as an affective medium, having the opportunity to reflect on these films beyond the aesthetics or cultural themes and patterns that they bring to light, which is core for finding personal and new interpretations of these films.

At a practical level, sympathising with the Sicilian home movie meant for me performing an investigation that progresses through analogy: the life scenes of Sicilian people from the 1960s compared to my life as a Romanian migrant in Sicily. This process led me to excavate in my own family's material and bring out films that I shot, or I have inherited from my family. Putting this material together, I was tempted to find patterns of organisation either thematically, aesthetically or conceptually. Yet looking closer at what could hold these shots together, I realised that any attempt to find a logical thread proved rather unstable. In a second phase, I began to look for recurrences in these scenes, to arrange them based on a personal impression that didn't follow any thematic or aesthetic logic. Fig. 22 depicts some stills of

these shots. The first, third and fourth image belong to my familial background, while the rest are shots extracted from Sicilian home movies that I worked with.

I refer to this 'personal impression' as a flow of sensations that led me to make spontaneous decisions. Montage took place through rhythmic associations rather than rhythmic timing, a concept used by Andrei Tarkovsky to explain how film directors alter or transcend the sense of time, to match the nature of the experience expressed in the film. If Alfredo Hitchcock creates a sense of rhythm that speeds up life processes and Robert Bresson generates the contrary effect of a lingering movement of time, my use of rhythmic montage follows the natural development of things, as they are perceived through the home moviemaker's filmic gestures. To this aim I do not intervene through cutting, slowing down or speeding up the pace of scenes. Deployed as a tool for tracing experience rather than assembling it, montage became similar to the process of in-camera editing. Instead of performing an emotional leakage from one shot to the other, montage facilitated a space of encounter; a space in which a transformative form of feeling-knowing transformed into a real potential for understanding these images. This process of montage managed to make sense through a series of fragmented memories, not by relying on collating as a way of cutting and editing, but rather on sequencing scenes. This form of editing laid out the common ground for a dialogue between these different shots. A new way of looking at this material opened up; one in which the distinction between my life and these people's lives became blurred, to give space to a poetics of identity. The importance of this use of montage - as a tool facilitating a state of sympathy that generates encounters instead of analogies - resides in the attempt to go beyond a learned or patterned way of seeing and towards one guided by affect. The result of my video experiment can be accessed at the following link: <https://youtu.be/-OI3xLeBK6k>. What I retrieved from this affective way of proceeding was the fact that the less I thought about filmic techniques and how scenes should be edited, the more I found the process meaningful for its end result. This leads me to conclude that an 'amateur' form of editing is suitable to bring out the affective power of the Sicilian home movie also for target audiences which are not knowledgeable about montage techniques.

## 7.2 Affective performativity

The affective permeability of the Sicilian home movie image brings to the fore the notion of body as that specific interface between the inside and the outside. Bodies operate for Bergson not only as carriers of affect, but also as surfaces of contact through which affect travels from

one body to the other. In fact, affect is a corporeal and, at the same time, material phenomenon (Bressani, 2010). In the second phase of my exploration, I look at the body as a surface that can be read as an affective map. Representing both a faculty through which we make sense of experiences and a medium reflecting the significance of experiences (Thrift, 2007), the body shows its capacity to affect and be affected by home movies. In my exploration of the affective and affected body, I chose to work with clothes as metaphors of bodies, as a second skin on which we inscribe our experiences. Robyn Gibson speaks in *The Memory of Clothes* (2015) about the affective memory of clothes (Gibson, 2015), and their ability to absorb our sensations as they unfold in specific circumstances. Clothes, more than anything else, “invoke bodies” (Reavey et al., 2015, p. 206); their appearance and texture nuance the specificity of experience. For example, a fancy dress that we wear on special occasions becomes a symbol reflecting a specific affective and cultural context. To feel a piece of clothing is to imagine the body that wears it, how the material feels against the body or how the garment fits the body. Clothing becomes that permeable skin through which affect transpires; at the same time affect impregnates the surface of clothes drawing an invisible map onto our bodies. By looking at clothes as an affective map, I go from the concept of body as a medium (read-only) to the concept of body as an inscribable surface (read-and-write). Acknowledging that for each person the ‘lived’ body is their affective centre, I start to explore my own body as an affective map. The aim of the second step of my practice is thus to investigate this position of the body, using a self-made garment as a metaphor of the permeable body. In the following section, I will walk the reader through the entire creation process, reflecting in specific moments on the meaning of different gestures that I performed to construct this garment.

The first step of the process was cutting and sewing. I chose a white thick cloth and cut a simple straight shape, similar to a cassock, using my own body as a model. This choice rendered the entire process more intimate, enabling me to internalise every gesture. At the same time, touching and feeling the garment, sensing its folds on my body as I tried it on, set the right atmosphere for a multisensorial experience. Next, I started choosing random stills from the analysed body of footage and printed them on paper. Using a manual method, I transferred pieces of the stills on the garment, arranging each of them according to my own imagination (Fig.23).

While I did most of the positioning spontaneously, there is one piece that I chose specifically for the superior part of the garment, in the place where a thirty centimetres long cut finished in the hole for the neck. This piece depicted the close-up face of a Sicilian woman, appearing only for two or

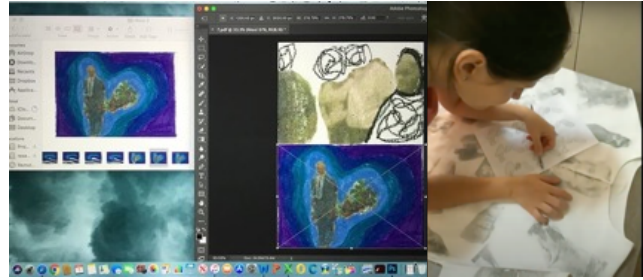


Fig. 23: Initial stages of the transfer

three seconds long in a longer sequence. The deepness of the woman’s gaze, but also the sense of insecurity and alienation that it transmitted, rendered the still portrait a highly impactful one. I transferred the woman’s image of the face on the upper part of the garment, where the deep cut at the neck divided her face in two parts (Fig.24). Beyond triggering a playful effect – the possibility to open and close the upper part of the garment and obtain an opening of the woman’s face – the image of the face synthesized perfectly the idea of affect as a sensitive chord, leading back to Gilles Deleuze’s definition of affect as “motor tendency on a sensitive nerve” (Deleuze, 2013, p. 98). Referring to the face as an organ-carrying plate of nerves, Deleuze defines affect as those micro-movements that synthesize and emerge on a motionless surface yet are kept hidden by the body. Affect becomes the imperceptible, which moves *things* (the expressions of the face) and at the same time moves *between* things (between the image on the screen and the audience). Transferring the woman’s face on a physical object means retrieving affect through the process of memory and anchoring it in the present. Drawing the woman’s face on the garment (as a metaphorical body) became synonymous with recuperating and materialising affect *with* and *through* the body; at the same time, it marked a visible affective transformation manifested through the new visual materiality of the body-garment.

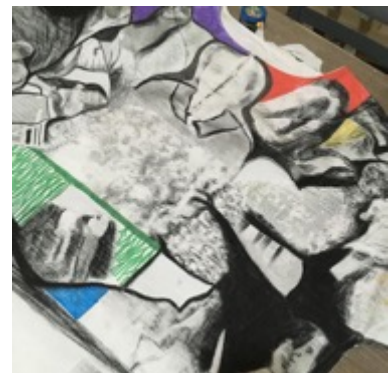


Fig. 24: Open & closed garment

The third and last part of work consisted in defining and strengthening the connection between the visual elements of the garment in a two-step process (Fig. 25). The first one consisted in drawing the links between the different visual elements using pencils, pens and charcoal. The second step referred to cutting out small blank pieces of textile that were not

bearing any image. Each of these two interventions played a specific role. On the one hand, drawing enabled me to make a connection between different elements, rendering the fragments of the affective map unitary and harmonic. To this end, I used vivid colours (black, blue, red and yellow) to build areas or textured fields that framed each visual element. This assemblage of visual fragments conferred upon the garment a sense of unity that nevertheless managed to highlight the identity of the single parts forming the ensemble. Moreover, charcoal proved useful for contouring those parts of the drawings that appeared quite faint as a result of the transfer process. In the end, I did not cover the entire surface of the garment with colour, insofar as doing so would have meant to force the concept of unity by imposing upon it the desire of completion.

This reasoning left me with blank areas of textile which I decided to cut off in the second phase of the process, leaving small holes in the garment. While drawing contributed to unifying and enhancing visual significance, cutting off pieces of white material did not account for the opposite, i.e. the lack of meaning. While these holes in the garment can be perceived as voids when contemplating it from a distance, they completely change their function when we wear the garment. When putting on the garment, each and every one of these holes offers a glimpse of the body of the person wearing it. This performative act shows the importance of lived experience for the completion of the affective map. On the one hand, it points to the fluidity of affect, suggested by the curved lines that harmonise and weave the visual memory fragments together. On the other hand, it proves that affective encounters are always intimate encounters, and thus a part of this experience always slips our cognition and representation. There will always be a part of affective experience that we cannot represent, but only manifest; such a manifestation requires our bodily presence. The creation process of the garment represents ultimately the performativity of affect, through which memory, materiality and intimacy are closely woven together. This reflective process can turn into an interesting creative exercise both for individuals as well as for entire groups of people who can collectively perform the affectivity of the Sicilian home movies through the



*Fig. 25: final garment*

ideation of their own garments. This collective power is something that I explore deeper in the third phase of the iteration process described in the following section.

### 7.3 Affective encounters

While the first two phases explore montage and tailoring as two creative methods for drawing out the medium and performativity of affect, they also point to affect as a sort of passionate transmission. Montage alludes to affect leaking from one scene to the other. Tailoring, instead, performs affect through the metaphoric body as a permeable and interactive surface, a sort of sensitive map that blurs the boundaries between bodies. While feminist theorist Teresa Brennan has engaged deeply with the transmission of affect as a constant communication between individuals and their physical and social environments, my take on the capacity of transmission of affect does not look at affect as a movement between bodies in a literal, physical sense with consequences for the medical and scientific field (Brennan, 2004). For Brennan, affects represent real entities taking the form of ghosts that pass through the air from one body to the other; she describes it as “a scent, as a perfume, as the transformation of hormone into pheromone” (Brennan, 2004, p.3). According to Brennan, we not only project affect unto others; we also absorb affect that others project onto us. In this light, affect is mainly tactile, transmitted as a contagion. While Brennan’s perspective is interesting in relation to the capacity of affect to circulate between bodies, what is even more interesting in the context of my project is to look at how this transmission or exchange is being facilitated by a participatory process: a space where bodies meet to explore *how* Sicilian home movies make sense. In the conclusive part of my affective exploration of the Sicilian home movie archive, I look at participatory practice as the relational context in which an affective reading of the home movie can unfold. My hypothesis is that participatory practice, through its collaborative nature, generates a favourable context in which affective spaces can unfold. To this end, I organise two workshops, one in Italy and the other in the UK, where I explore different artistic and creative methods to facilitate an affective reading process of the archive. In this context, I make use of Deleuze’s concept of affection-image to guide me through the process.

### 7.3.1 Affection-image

Building on Bergson's notion of time, Deleuze develops his theory of affect. Among many other theories that resonate with filmic language, his is probably one of the most effective ones in investigating our experience of the moving image. Explored extensively through the notion of the affection-image (Deleuze, 1997), the filmic concept of affect goes back to those forces that emerge from encounters between bodies and their capacity to act. Deleuze refers to affect as "the continuous variation of someone's force of existing" and affection as "the nature of the modified body"—how the encounter leaves "traces of another body on my body" (Deleuze, 1978, p.4). In doing so, his focus shifts from an object-based exploration to a relational exploration of affect. For Deleuze, the affection-image is that particular type of moving image in which the experience of time is not anymore tied to a representation as movement in space; instead of making sense of images through sensory-motor situations, we make sense of these through visual and sound contexts. As such, the affection-image replaces the rational connections we make between shots with irrational ones. This move marks the passage from seeing what lies *behind* the image – which Deleuze defines as the movement-image – to enduring what is already visible in the image that characterises the time-image (Deleuze, 1978). Therefore, the position of the affection-image in the context of the movement-image marks a suspension (a moment of pause between action and reaction), while its position in the time-image determines another type of connection between images, insofar as it manages to break the sensory-motor chain. Looking at the Sicilian home movie through the lens of affection-images proposes a new way of seeing that opens towards imaginative and collaborative forms of reading the Sicilian home movie archive, rather than falling back upon disciplinary frames. I deploy the notion of affection-image as a supporting tool in the two workshops that I organised in Italy and the UK, in order to open up the affective registers of the Sicilian home movie to reflexive and collaborative practice.

### 7.3.2 Participatory process

I organised the two workshops in the frame of the Cracking the Established Order Conference in Leicester (June 2019) and Innovate Heritage Conference in Catanzaro (October 2019). While the audience at the first workshop consisted mainly of artists or practice-led researchers and the audience of the second event brought together specialists in social sciences, these



participants were not specialised in audio-visual heritage or amateur film. This was important for the aims of the project in order to explore co-creation with a community of non-specialists. While, for the first event, I briefly presented the concept of affection-images and moderated the co-creative working process in groups, for the second workshop I deployed two brief exercises before the teamwork, in order to put participants at ease with creative methods such as drawing and imaginative writing. The core process of the workshops consisted in participants being introduced to the concept of affection-images and encouraged to use it as a frame for creatively engaging with selected home movie scenes. Participants could use whatever technique they preferred, from drawing, performance, sound editing, image editing, to collage, mood boards or other mixed media. To this end, I printed out some stills from a selected home movie scene with which they could play. Through this collaborative work, participants developed readings corresponding to a shared lived experience. The aim was not to re-interpret home movies using a creative lens, but to draw on the intuitive and the sensuous that artistic practice has to offer, in order to collaboratively explore the Sicilian home movie archive as an archive that we can relate to. The ultimate aim is the creation of an affective space in which bodies interact and co-constitute one another in a process of constant dialogue.

## 7.4 Results

There is one major observation that I want to make in regard to the outcome of the workshops; this is related to the categories of audiences attending these events. In the first group of nine participants prevailed a more individualistic working process, where each member of the team preferred to develop their own project and then share it with the rest of the group. In the second group, comprising around twenty-five participants, the collaborative teamwork was much more cohesive and engaging, people managing to work well together. On the one hand, this can be attributed to the participant profiles. While the first group was obviously accustomed to working independently as practice-based researchers and possessed therefore a much stronger capacity to express thoughts creatively, the second group was more open to collaborative work as a way of developing a shared vision. On the other hand, I believe this difference is also based on trust issues. While for the first event the workshop took place relatively fast, with participants not having the opportunity to know each other beforehand, for the second event the workshop took place in the second day, giving participants enough time to socialise beforehand. Having said this, the results of both workshops were surprising for me, bringing

to light a variety of creative methods and different ways to relate to these images. I will present briefly in the following paragraphs each of the projects developed in the frame of the workshop by explaining what has been done and quoting where possible the authors of the projects. I will round off the presentation with a brief note on my own experience of these workshops and some final remarks as conclusions. All projects can be accessed through the interactive documentary *Spaesi: a poetics of identity*, on the project’s website.

### 7.4.1 Cracking the Established order workshop projects (CtEO)

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#### Performing affectivity

- *Dr. Alexa Wright (Univ. of Westminster)* -

Dr. Wright worked with performance. Her project explores: ‘the materiality of the film -its instability. The relation with us, the viewers. The form of the object as a fragment with texture, but too inconsistent to act as a self-contained narrative (our implied role in the narrative; evocation of personal memories)’. (Wright, 2019).




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#### Immersive photography

- *Dr. Tom Jackson (Univ. of Leeds)*-

Imagining himself as a photographer intervening in the scene, Dr. Jackson constructed a mood board. He explains: “I imagined myself as the photographer in the scene, taking images of the people playing up to the camera. I then combined all of these images into a mood board in which all of those moments can be viewed simultaneously”. (Jackson, 2019)

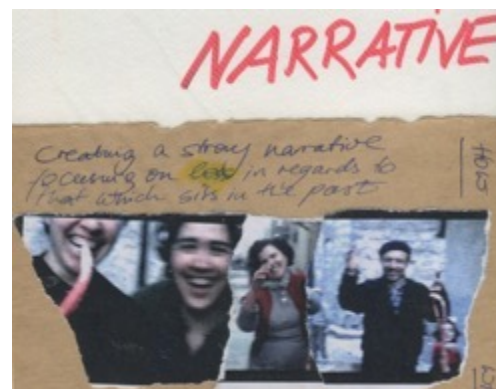



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#### Building narratives

- *Andrea Jaeger (PhD Posthuman Photography, Nottingham Trent Univ.)* -

Andrea Jager focused on the concept of loss, “in regard to that which sits in the past” (Jager, 2019). She explored loss through a collage made from fragments of stills.



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## Aria

*Maria Straw Cinar - poet, writer, actress, teacher -*

Maria Straw added music as a response to the lack of sounds in the clip. She chose quite 'stereotypical' music (Maria Calas -Tosca) as a response to a scene which she also felt was stereotypical. Yet the 'dada-ist' method she used to select the opera piece as a musical background was quite interesting: Maria (her own name), aria (Italian: opera), ria, air, a.



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## Architecture of gestures

*-Peter Jordan Turner (Assoc. Lecturer Univ. of Derby) -*

For Peter Turner, the performed gestures of the people in the home movie scene were essential to construct an architecture of gestures, which he then represented through abstract graphic signs underneath the stills.

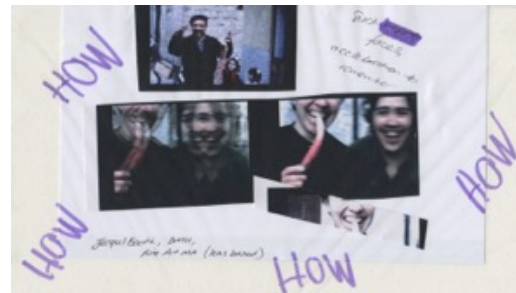


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## Affectivity

*- Jacqui Booth – Photographer*

Jacqui Booth selected those images that were most affective, using her experience as a photographer. She collated these stills in order to build a larger board. The concept of *face* was fundamental when making the selection of the still frames.

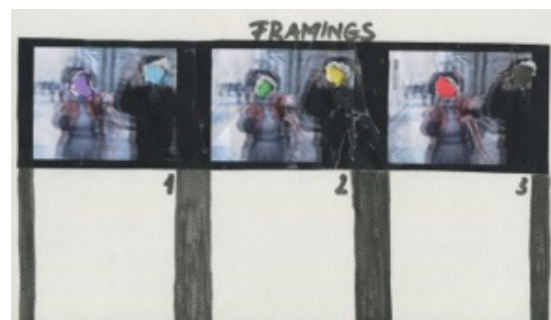


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## Identities

*Anonymous participant*

This project looked at the concept of identity and absence through *decoupage* and *collage*.

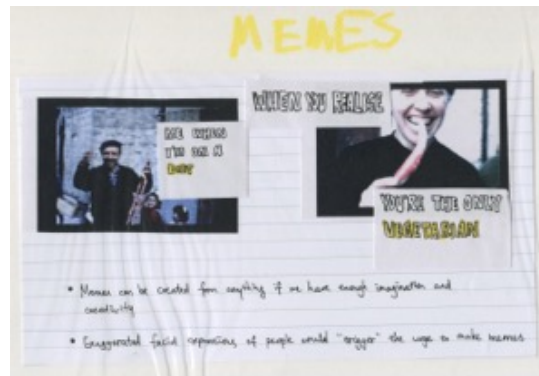


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## Memes

*Anonymous participant*

This project ingeniously constructed memes with the help of stills. Using these images imaginatively and intuitively, the participant used the 'exaggerated' facial expressions of people in these images to reflect on our present dietary preoccupations.



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## Atmospheres

*Anonymous participant*

This project looked at the atmosphere generated by the scenes. The participant selected shaky images in order to build a larger mood board of the scene.



### 7.4.2 Innovate Heritage workshop projects

At the Innovate Heritage conference, I presented an installation (Fig. 26) exposing the results of my practice-led experiments and conducted a participatory workshop. The installation aimed to engage participants in a reflexive process on the value of arts and creative practices to influence methodologies and propose a novel perspective of the home movie. The installation comprised five elements: the garment I produced, a small wooden table on which I printed stills from analysed home movie scenes, an album with the drawing and writing experiments from the ethnographic field research and two computers showcasing the drawing manipulations of scenes and my edited video. Participants and visitors could browse through the album, look at the videos and write down on pieces of paper their own thoughts in relation to these films.



Fig. 26 Installation

The participatory workshop produced three main collaborative projects. The results (drawings) of the two individual exercises preceding the group work can be viewed on the website and the interactive documentary. I decided not to include them in this chapter, insofar as they are part of preparatory work enabling participants to feel more at ease with creative methods and were therefore not part of the final projects. In the following paragraphs, I will analyse in greater depth the three collaborative projects produced during the workshop.

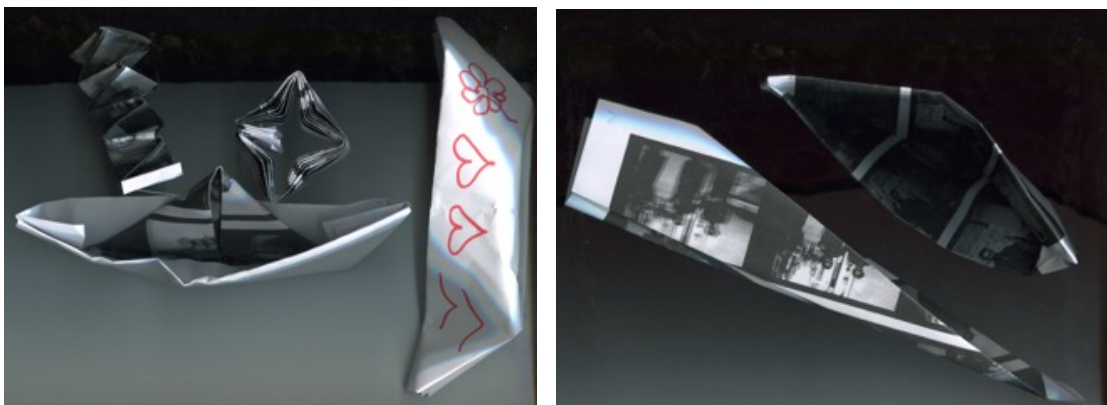
### Re-enacting affect through play

The first group of participants engaged in a discussion about the nature of the images, their heritage value as fragments of memory and its transmission. The initial way of making sense of these images was through dialogue. As the discussions became more engaging, participants started using their hands to fold and manipulate the sheets of paper containing the printed stills (Fig. 27).



*Fig. 27 Working process*

The resulting objects of this playful engagement are paper boats, airplanes and two hand-crafted objects (shape of star and foldable leaflet). Some of the objects were folded in such a way as to show the printed stills, others were displaying only the reverse side of the paper. One boat had also small symbols on it: flowers, hearts and flying birds (Fig. 28).



*Fig. 28 Objects group 1*

This playful process of engagement led to the production of dynamic symbols that stand for travel and mobility. The interesting aspect of this kind of interaction with home movie stills lies in the fact that participants re-enacted unconsciously the migrant history of the Liga family, to which this film extract belongs. Play facilitated an affective engagement with the films through the objectification of memory.

### *Affecting materiality*

Although the second group of participants tended to work more independently compared to the first group, participants often shared impressions and opinions with the rest of the team members. Instead of constructing objects

of knowledge, the second team constructed mainly mechanisms of knowledge. By mechanisms, I refer to small two-dimensional constructs which enable a sort of physical interaction with the stills. The three examples in Fig. 29 show how cutting, drawing and gluing have been used to build these mechanisms. The first example introduced vertical (coloured) stills in the horizontal row of printed images. By pulling on one end of the horizontal bar, the coloured stills could perform a sliding movement through the horizontal cuts. The second example worked through vertical cuts in the lower row of images that could be folded and unfolded so as to render parts of the original images visible or invisible. In the last example several frames have been cut out and then re-inserted in the original place but in a vertical position, creating an effect of depth of the image. All these examples play with the materiality of the image to generate mechanisms of affective engagement.



Fig. 29 Objects group 2

The other two examples from this group (Fig.30) can be grouped under the topic of memes (one meme was produced also in the frame of CtEO). Memes are images that are paired with a short phrase to create an immediate and compelling effect. Memes are an interesting phenomenon reflecting the contemporary visual culture or subculture. The first example of meme is a blue line connecting the differed stills and accompanied by the phrase ‘together is better’. The second one uses red colour to add background and symbols to the images. In the centre of the page, the author marked in red colour a calendar page with an exact date: Sunday, 18 July 1976. These memes play with the visual culture of the *home mode*, trying to deconstruct a stereotyped way of looking at these films through a double process of negation: the stereotyped image is overlaid with a stereotyped phrase.



Fig. 30 Objects group 2

### Performing belonging

The third group worked on a performative exhibition on the theme of belonging and affectivity. As the group progressed through the discussion of the visual elements composing the scene, they started drawing out shared meanings and cutting out vertical strips of images, arranging them on the ground (Fig. 31). As the discussion



Fig. 31 Group 3

progressed further and other rows of images were cut, members of the group started gluing



them together, forming long sequences of images. In the following step, participants started closing these long rows of images in huge loops (Fig. 32). One loop was then placed around the neck of each and every one of the team members and then interlaced with another loop, so as to form a human chain that enclosed individuals in this huge mechanism. United by these huge loops, group members started walking together through the room, performing a rotatory movement.



Fig. 32, Group 3

This last project combined performance and collage to produce a *living installation*. In this moving mechanism, each of the participants interpreted affect through the lens of belonging. Brought together as one symbiotic system, participants had to adopt a rhythmical and synchronised movement, in order not to break the paper loops that kept them together as a community. In doing so, they affectively engaged with the concept of belonging, not as an abstract value, but rather as a dynamic concept that is able to shift behaviours (moving collectively). This was in my opinion one of the most interesting experiments of the workshops, insofar as it managed to mobilize participatory practice in a direction that worked with values in order to move our way of *seeing* the archive towards a way of *enacting* the archive.

The advantage of managing a smaller group, at the CtEO, was that I gained more insight into the profiles of each participant and could continue the dialogue after the workshops. Through an exchange of e-mails with some of the participants, I could further assess how the workshop activity impacted on their personal work. Communicating with four of the participants after the workshop, I was pleasantly surprised to find out that the workshop had positively impacted on their own work, helping them sometimes to put into perspective their personal projects. Maria-Cinar for example wrote: 'It [the workshop] gave me food for thought regarding recreating the poets of the Belle Epoch and beyond and my field research walking in the steps of Natalie

Barney in Paris and her journal through Europe to Lesbos. I also had an idea about mixing time frames in my Drama showing Sappho in Ancient Greece (1900), with the refugees washed up on the shorelines'. The advantage of managing a larger group, at the Innovate Heritage conference, consisted in the opportunity to foster strong collaborative processes that gave rise to insightful projects. The three projects produced in the frame of the workshop are good examples of how thinking and acting together can set the foundations of a *living archive* that is truly reflecting the present times.

## 7.5 Conclusions

My own take on artistic and imaginative methods for exploring an affective reading of the Sicilian home movie makes use of the concept of in-camera editing as an affective medium, of the body as an affective mechanism, and of affection-images as participatory tools fostering affective encounters. Participatory practice used in the frame of the workshops shed light on ways of looking at the Sicilian home movie that open towards a collective way of making sense of these films, which returns to these images their role as social objects. The interest of workshop participants in the playful, tactile and performative aspects of these films indicates the potential value of such methods for work with local communities and other non-specialists that tests if and how these audiences are able to develop new ways of relating to these archives. While, on the one hand, the workshops prove that the work with these films provided participants with food for thought in relation to their own work, they also call for further investigation and testing with broader categories of publics. Are these methods working with other audiences too and if so, what kind of performative or shared approach to knowing the archive can they give rise to?

While these experiments point to further possibilities of testing and exploration, they also testify to the effectiveness of using affection-images as tools for transforming our way of looking at these films. In contributing to the shift from *seeing* as an ordinary gesture to *seeing* as a visionary and performative gesture, the affection-image used as a tool to foster collaborative work “evokes a function of clairvoyance, which is at the same time critique and sympathy, fantasy and observation” (Deleuze, 1997, p. 33). This is what affected me most about the results of the participatory process: the capacity to anticipate, to play in a serious yet free manner, to excavate in the home movie image a potential that appears obvious yet escapes any clear attempt of definition, to observe how these images move and make sense when

approached by people with different visions and backgrounds. An exploration of the Sicilian home movie that passes through an affective lens gives rise to a space of encounters. These spaces are those

where coding and decoding, territorialization and deterritorialization, and stratification and de-stratification assemble to define a Deleuzian-Guattarian plane of immanence; where the middle or milieu or in-between-ness that characterizes the relation between expression and content becomes the affective space in which bodies interact and identity proliferates. (Stover, 2017, p. 7).

Insofar as any attempt of definition of such spaces fails to fully describe them, I tried to reflect upon their emergence in a different way: through practice. To this end, I used *modulation* as a process of tracing the subtle movements through which these spaces emerge. The entire process of modulation and the final result which was published in the frame of Bath Spa's International Journal of Creative Media Research, is available at the following link: <https://www.creativemediaresearch.org/post/exploring-marginalities>.

# Conclusion

The contribution of my practice-led PhD to the field of home movies consisted in proposing a novel methodology for the investigation of the Sicilian home movie archive, one that sits at the intersection of theory and practice. Based on this approach, I developed a series of new visualisation and engagement modalities that deploy artistic exercises to opening up the meaning of these archives. These ‘reading modalities’ speak about the need to celebrate visual experience, bodily expressions and affective impressions as part of a more personal and immersive way of engaging with these cultural assets. The thesis, with its associated practice, provides solid evidence for having achieved this objective. While this thesis lays out a detailed framework of investigation of these archives with its respective theoretical and practical implications, the project website<sup>46</sup> displays the practical component: the emerging reading modalities, the interactive documentary (i-doc) and the associated PDF guide that allow audiences to autonomously undertake experiments with home movies. While the website is already available, the i-doc will be officially released in the frame of the 2020 Home Movie Day Event (Bologna),<sup>47</sup> ensuring a broad dissemination of both the interactive tool as well as the other project components.

From a theoretical perspective, Bergson’s model of actualization provided a suitable critical frame for experimenting with archival reading approaches that are intuitive and personalised, and therefore adaptable to a wide range of audiences. Bergson’s is a living philosophy that aims to forge new concepts by expanding our perceptual capacities in relation to these films<sup>48</sup> which fitted very well the experimental nature of the project. The theoretical arguments put forth by this frame have been presented at two conferences – ‘Writing History, Constructing the Archive’ conference (Udine, 2019) and the ‘European Congress of Qualitative Inquiry’ (Malta, 2019). Attendees raised interesting questions about the capacity of creative insights to shift fixed habits in relation to the way we look at but also use these archives. The

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<sup>46</sup> Please see: [www.homemoviesicily.com](http://www.homemoviesicily.com).

<sup>47</sup> The Home Movie Day event is a worldwide event organised by archives, research centres and libraries dealing with home movies. The Italian event organised yearly by Home Movie Bologna will most probably take place virtually this year, due to the COVID outbreak.

<sup>48</sup> Through his philosophy, Bergson brings together the creative process and the novelty of life itself. Relying on intuition as a form of creative evolution, Bergson teaches us to see things from a holistic perspective, giving so rise to a new way of understanding life. This focus on Bergson’s philosophy as a philosophy of life has been addressed by Suzanne Guerlac (Guerlac S., 2005, *Thinking in time: Henri Bergson*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Volume 120, Number 5 (Comparative Literature Issue), p. 1091-1098) and the essays collected in *Interpreting Bergson: Critical Essays* (Lefebvre A. and Nils F. Schott (eds.), *Interpreting Bergson: Critical Essays*, Cambridge University Press, 2020, 238p.)

methodological frame of the project is being currently published as part of the conference proceedings in Udine and is expected to trigger more reactions as to its applicability for the archival sector. The imaginative writing exercises, mentioned in the introduction of my thesis and the subsequent fieldwork experiments that led to the use of drawing, sound recording, and participatory practice, represent instances in which my theoretical framework guided the practical fieldwork experiments.

The need to test Bergson's perception theories through practice started early on in the project, when I realised that there are as many ways of looking at these archives as there are people. While speaking about these archives with artists, researchers and archivists, I observed that although they seemed to express similar ideas about these films, when investigating further about their motivations and impressions, opinions began to diverge. The examples of creative reuse of this footage and the co-creative workshop exercises brought to light the subtleties in the way people look at and think about these archives, which more conventional approaches could not reveal. This subtlety renders each perspective unique and impossible to uncover through language. Language is not only insufficient in coming to terms with the many nuances of perception. It requires, above all, practical testing through the implementation of activities or ways of doing that enable us to express differently what we see, think and feel about these films.

Artistic exercises proved to be valuable tools in dealing with Bergson's theory of perception. At the same time, they refined this theoretical frame based on the results of practice, sometimes calling for other concepts such as that of creative imaginaries, embodiment, affection-images, to deepen and/or clarify these experiments. This gave rise to an iterative process of testing critical theory against practice and practice against theory that enabled me to establish a dialogue between creative practice and the critical frame that I adopted. Although guided by a high degree of intuition and freedom in selecting and applying theoretical and practical modalities, this process was not easy. I took small steps, reflecting on Bergson's critical frame and came up with ways of testing its components in practice. At each step, I had to constantly re-frame and re-phrase my understanding of these films and the way we can engage with them. This guided my attention towards additional conceptual constructs and practical experiments. I could describe this iterative process as a 'guideposted' one, where critical insights provided me with some clarity to what I should be looking for in the next step. Guideposts operate as a sort of streetlights, showing me the way to the next step of the project by shedding a dim light on its area of intervention, while at the same time illuminating the

previous steps. Their specificity lies in the context-sensitivity and flexibility to adapt to the shifting modalities of the project. In doing so, this way of taking action designed a responsive process, rather than relying on a pre-established set of criteria to be validated through the process.

The initial talks to archivists, the interviews conducted with artists and my own visits to institutional archives created the favourable contexts that lay the foundation of a roadmap that further enabled me to design and implement specific creative experiments. Compared to traditional methods of approaching archival film, this way of proceeding added a level of uncertainty to the entire process. This rendered interventions harder to handle as it required more focus and testing and trialling different possibilities. On the other hand, it enabled me to disrupt those easy assumptions and expectations, that have been raised around the home movie through decades of applying traditional frames of analysis. The 're-definition' of the home movie that I offered in the opening of the thesis, as well as the emerging tacit, embodied and affective experiments, sustain this iterative process that touches un/known possibilities for reading the Sicilian home movie. Simultaneously, they indicate that this framework has the potential to inform and transform our experience of the archive, through the formulation of new theoretical-practical modalities through which we can build our own readings of these archives. The whole methodology can operate well in synchronicity with existing theoretical approaches, as a way of gradually opening up our perception abilities towards readings of these films that are more intuitive and sensuous and therefore stand closer to the nature of the archive. Nevertheless, the artistic exercises proposed in the frame of the reading experiments could also work on their own (implemented digitally or in the frame of workshops conducted by specialised entities), giving rise to a combination of new and experimental ways to interpret audio-visual repositories.

The very nature of the research process, and the degree of uncertainty that it brought with it, makes us interrogate the extent to which this process managed to answer the initial research queries formulated by the project. Was this process able to use artistic interventions to transform traditional frames of analysis of these films and render the archive more relatable? Regarding the first part, although some interesting proposals could be made about the extent to which film analysis, ethnographic and participatory practice could open up towards more personal and experimental formats, I still feel that the project requires further investigation. It is not easy to disrupt decades of theoretical thinking and critical frames of analysis by proposing different ways of operating. Therefore, further tests need to be conducted with

audiences in order to assess how the integration of these exercises within film analysis, ethnography and participatory practice can give rise to more democratic and inclusive methodologies for engaging with home movie archives. This step makes even more sense when thinking that home movies are social objects i.e., they bring people together to share experiences. An opening of analytical modalities in this direction, would only align with the nature of these cultural assets. The already experimented and other additional exercises could be therefore tested in different community contexts such as Home Movie Days, local workshops conducted by museums and cultural associations or even proposed in collaboration with tourism entities.

What I feel that the project managed to achieve, instead, is to gradually open up perception of the archive to the sensuous, implicit and affective, which are core components of lived experience. These interventions proved that creativity and artistic actions are able to transform our experience by generating suitable contexts<sup>49</sup> in which new interpretative scenarios can unfold. What is even more interesting about the way in which the project proceeded in opening up the meaning of the archive is its methodological framework. This framework initiated a dialogue between theory – the loose critical structure relying on Bergson’s model of actualization – and practice – the conceptual exercises that fitted into this model and were further tested through creative exercises. To this end, the project provides useful building blocks in the form of three critical-practical constructs or modalities that are positioned at the intersection of a theoretical and practical ‘way of knowing’ that inspire us to ‘see more’ (see with the hands/body/through each other).

The three modalities that I explored can be accessed through the project website and represent the foundational basis for the construction of the interactive documentary *Spaesi: a poetics of identity*. On the one hand, the i-doc orchestrates the reading modalities tested throughout the project, offering an interactive and meaningful interface between the public and the project. It provides evidence for how these developed methods can work in practice and how they can be used to produce a different and disembodied way of knowing the archive that can circumvent decades of academic approaches which tend to exclude the general public. On the other hand, the documentary opens a window upon further necessary research and testing that should provide further reading modalities to those already developed. It also raises the question of how now, after having conducted my tests and having provided audiences with the

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<sup>49</sup> I refer here to the examples of creative imaginaries that such practices can give rise to, which have been uncovered by the eleven conducted interviews.

tools and guides to start their own experiments, these methods can be taken mainstream, integrated as part of bigger digital or physical initiatives and what kind of synergies they can build with institutional archives. To this aim, a conversation with Home Movies Bologna around the interactive documentary and its use has already been initiated.<sup>50</sup> This represents an important step forward in expanding the outreach and scope of the project. I have also successfully integrated some of the creative exercises developed in the PhD project into two projects that have been funded by the WORTH programme and the British Council. In the *Wear-Abouts* project, I deploy co-creative drawing exercises with children in order to give a new meaning to clothes. This leads to the formulation of new possibilities to include children drawings as pattern prints in fashion collections that take into account children's personal creative universe and imaginary. In the *Print out of Print* project, I use the concept of affection-images to conduct workshops where participants think 'with' technology instead of thinking about the capacity of technology to transform traditional printmaking. The outcome of this process is the realisation of new design objects positioned at the intersection of tradition and new practices. These projects testify to the potential of using these creative exercises to inspire new working frameworks for areas beyond the home movie sector (fashion/ design).<sup>51</sup>

Although my practice-led PhD set out to develop a novel methodology for experiencing these archives, maybe the most poignant contribution refers to encouraging a different way of seeing. One that is intuitive, imaginative, embodied and affective and could be applied to more than just home movies. In the following section, I will briefly outline how each creative experiment went beyond answering the project's research questions. In doing so, they made a contribute to opening up perception to what I call an 'attentive mode of living' that impacts not only our perception of these films but the world around us, and implicitly, our lives.

In terms of visual perception, the first exercise looked at *how can we see beyond what interests us or what we are used to seeing in the home movie*. Mixing the affordances of new technologies with traditional drawing methods enabled me to develop a new way of 'seeing

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<sup>50</sup> In late 2019, during one of my last visits at Home Movie Bologna, I presented the creative experiments I was conducting in the frame of my project and the i-doc I intended to build as a result of my research. This raised interesting questions about the 'lifespan' of the documentary and the possibility to include it in broader initiatives. I intend to explore further these opportunities after September 2020 when I will release the full version of the documentary.

<sup>51</sup> In fact, arts-based participatory practices have been increasingly adopted by researchers and practitioners alike to solve complex and tricky research issues in social sciences and beyond. A good example thereof is the *Arts-Based Methods for Transformative Engagement* Toolkit developed by Rose Pearson E., Malin Bäckman, Sara Grenni, Angela Moriggi, Siri Pisters and Anke de Vrieze, whose core aim is to shift participatory practices around sustainability, by introducing a novel way of engagement. The toolkit is available at the following link: <https://www.sustainableplaceshaping.net/arts-based-toolkit/>



with the hands’; a way that loosens up the meaning-making structure of images and draws out the intuitive/unconscious in the visual. This modality becomes an interesting, and above all, relatable instrument of sense-making that democratizes traditional film analysis by rendering it less technical and specialised. In fact, drawing might not be easily adopted by conventional research frames, but can turn into an interesting instrument to use with a non-specialist public. The general audience can deploy this exercise as a playful way of experimenting with and learning about their own way of looking at these films. This capacity of the first creative exercise consisting in intuitive drawing was highlighted by a participant at one of the workshops that I organised. The participant noticed how drawing enabled him to become more aware of his own way of seeing things and the frames or conventions he used to decode the world around him. In addition to this potential use as a learning and experimentation tool, this modality can be thought of as a way of screening collective imaginaries. Deployed as a shared practice by people from the same community, these exercises can offer essential information about collective ways of looking at the world at a given moment in time. As such, they provide a complex analytical frame for the social sciences that uses new ways of capturing collective knowledge. In fact, the sort of attention fostered by this engagement modality is one that expands visual perception – not only in relation to home movies –, from a habitual and learned capacity to a lived, contextualised and holistic apprehension of the world. Liberating our visual capacity enables us to see more, not in a spiritual sense but rather by dilating perception through the body and eyes. ‘Seeing with the hands’ as well as ‘seeing with the body’ are not alternative forms of perception; they become careful and attentive forms of acknowledging the world.

If ‘seeing with the hands’ represented a first step to liberate our sight from habit, the second creative exercise of ‘seeing with the body’ presented a much more challenging approach to exploring the boundaries of perceptual capacity. Thinking about the body in terms of its mediating ability, as a tool that traces lived experience, requires us to reposition ourselves in relation to the complex sensory capacity of the body, not only in relation to sight. In this respect, it encourages to think *how an embodied experience of the home movie settings can open up the space of perception*. Somatic postcards and sonic landscapes are the creative responses developed in relation to this question. They provide a new vocabulary for reading these texts, one that looks at how our bodies deal with experience in terms of duration and intuition. The importance of such tools lies in the awareness levels and the role of the experiencing subject in this process. Apps such as Play the City App Re<sup>52</sup>, which enable

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<sup>52</sup> The app can be accessed here: <http://playthecity.homemovies.it/#/welcome>

visitors to explore a touristic destination through the lens of the home movies shot in these places, portray an interesting visit yet one that remains confined to a passive experience. What if we engaged the public directly in the production of experience by giving them the technical and creative tools that are necessary to explore in the first person? How might they perceive and create spaces that lie at the intersection of memory and emplaced experience?

Visiting the same places where these home movies were shot and immersing oneself in the process of creating one's own story of that place can be an empowering experience. At the same time, we cannot but ask ourselves to what extent people would be able to engage in these sorts of activities that require specific tools or are at least time consuming. I believe that connecting these exercises to the processes of memory production can be helpful to stimulate people's interest in these methodologies. For example, facilitating the construction of a personal travel diary based on the production of somatic postcards rather than simply taking pictures of visited places could be an interesting way of personalising travel experience. Obviously, this possibility needs further research in order to be turned into a valid marketing tool for territories or other similar instruments; yet the potential of such creative and immersive documentations of emplaced experience are palpable. Moreover, the impact of this experiential modality resonates beyond the home movie field or the tourism sector. As a shared experience, the process of being able to trace lived experience through the use of creative methods such as drawing, writing and recording represent tools that can be deployed to foster wellbeing. For example, somatic postcards can be rethought as somatic garments, drawn and worn by people with traumas, depression or distress; these garments can be produced in the places that bear the memory of abuse, places that should be perceived as home but do not resonate as such, or simply places that people need to re-establish a connection with.<sup>53</sup> Using creative practice for therapeutic purposes has, nevertheless, deep ethical implications. It raises important questions about the qualification of specialists who are trained to use such methods and about the rights and privacy of patients. Creativity is a powerful tool for tackling such complex challenges, yet at the same time it needs to be used correspondingly and responsibly.

The different conversations that these creative exercises sparked, and the imaginative possibilities they unleashed around the reading of these archives, encouraged me to consider further engagement formats. The third and last iterative phase of the project looked at *what kinds of affective encounters with the archive participatory methods can unleash and how they*

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<sup>53</sup> This is a possibility I have spoken about with researcher from South Africa at the European Conference of Qualitative Inquiry in Malta. The researcher was very interested to see how she could use such practices of drawing on garments with women suffering from traumas of abuse.

*are able to re-dimension our perceptual abilities.* The two participatory workshops that I tested, explored the concept of affection-images as relatable concepts that open up the reading of these archives at the level of communities. Nevertheless, what these exercises triggered is something more, a reflexive capacity to think creatively about broader aspects than just home movies. Three examples testify to this impact of the workshops. The first insight refers to an exchange of e-mails with one of the workshop participants, who made an interesting remark about how the exercises used in the workshop helped her think more creatively and imaginatively about her own work (see page 110 of the thesis).

The second insight surfaced during the workshop organised as part of the Cracking the Established Order conference (Leicester, UK, July 2019) and refers to a reflection by one of the participants on the nature of practice and the creativity involving this kind of process. Referring to the process of producing affection-images as a way of creating meaning in relation to our experience of the home movie, the participant explained that he sees a gap or a space between the recorded media (home movie) and the creative media we deploy to trace our experience. This gap is filled in by a sort of reflexivity that fuels this creative process and defines the entire procedure as a ‘critical-reflexive practice’.

The third consists of an observation made during the Innovative Heritage workshops (Catanzaro, Italy, October 2019) that refers to one of the teams’ work. This team produced paper boats, airplanes and other paper objects using the printed stills extracted from home movies. Although performed rather unconsciously, this represented a gesture of a metaphorical re-enactment of the family’s migrant history, to which these films belong. Alluding to a universe of travel and movement, the objects produced by the team represent constructs of family memory, materialised through a tacit yet collective effort. We could conclude that the choice of objects could have been a coincidence or an involuntary gesture. Yet at the same time we could also conclude that playfulness and freedom are able to guide experience of these films in a direction that manages to uncover their real nature. This second assumption led me to reflect upon the power of collective play as a way of connecting the dots between things that are not directly visible or acknowledged in these films. The insight offered by this playful method goes beyond the associative power of ideas, as it refers to things that we are unaware of and therefore become difficult to bring to light. Collective play, although tested here in the context of the home movie, can be looked upon as a powerful tool unleashing novel ways of looking at the world that is positioned at the intersection of critical thinking and personal subjectivity.

These three examples testify to the broader impact of such participatory exercises. By reconciling contrasts, the spaces generated by these modalities evoke, as Deleuze said, “a function of clairvoyance, which is at the same time critique and sympathy, fantasy and observation” (Deleuze, 1997, p. 33). In doing so, they facilitate a degree of attention to life that is dialectical, imaginative and intuitive at the same time and has therefore the capacity to creatively transform our perception. All three modalities explored in the project give rise to ‘a poetics of identity’ of the Sicilian home movie that, more than speaking about the Sicilian home movie archive, establish a dialogue with it. In fact, the interactive documentary developed in the frame of the project is more than an accessible way to acknowledge the research findings. *Spaes: a poetics of identity* is a statement of a non-standard mode of knowing the Sicilian archive that exceeds disciplinary understanding and normative frames of perception, but at the same time it does not exclude them. The level of interactivity of the documentary and the layered meaning-making structure it gives access to generate a mode of thought and experience of the archive which is not possible to obtain through traditional analysis. This engagement modality is necessarily collective and relational, turning into a sort of laboratory for a collaborative exploration of the philosophical, aesthetic and relational dimension of the archive.

This thesis, the project website containing the three developed modalities of reading and the related interactive documentary provide evidence for the project’s broad exploratory practices that aim to introduce more immediate and loose methodologies of looking at and understanding the Sicilian home movie archive. These practices are valuable insofar as they align to and expand upon experimental initiatives such as the grassroots projects and workshops looked at in the opening of this thesis. They also prove the potential to inform methodologies in other areas of the cultural and the creative sector that have to increasingly deal with non-formalised material that is hard to examine through the lens of conventional analytical frames. This opens two future areas of investigation for the project.

The first would be to look how we can take tools such as the interactive documentary into the mainstream, to embed it in existing institutional archives and their collections. In this respect, a first step has already been made through the collaboration established with Home Movies Bologna. Releasing the interactive documentary in the frame of the forthcoming Home Movie Day represents a next step in assessing how this platform can be integrated in this institution’s own digital presence. Home Movie Bologna has already released on its website several home movie collections. The interactive documentary developed in my project can

become an additional digital tool to be managed and exploited as an interface with the public. This interactive tool becomes also important for the future of media research and audience engagement strategies that have to increasingly deal with digitalised material. The integration of the documentary in an institutional frame is in my opinion a good strategic choice compared to its independent management, as it can provide further growth through curatorial attention and content enrichment.

The second considers the impact of the tested creative exercises and their associated interaction modalities. As imaginative actions, these exercises can provide interesting building blocks for both participatory and individual contexts that require a creative transformation of working processes. As such, the conceptual frames for these exercises can be adapted to meet the needs of different projects. Thinking in terms of research, we could release these tools as part of other similar instruments like the *Arts-Based Methods for Transformative Engagement* toolkits that I mentioned earlier. In this context, these exercises could help organisers of participatory events or projects that require group work, to consider their object of study or the challenges they have to tackle, under a new light. Thinking in terms of a broader community use, we could envisage these tools as educational instruments that can train our perceptual and cognitive abilities. Included in workshops, classrooms or online trainings/tutorials, these exercises represent an interesting complement to traditional curricula in visual and media-related subjects.

The variety of future potential research directions that this thesis opened up, stands as a testimony of the thought-provoking nature of its methodology. The home movie has always been considered a borderline product that breaks with cinematic standards and occupies a liminal position between the artistic and non-artistic domain. It will probably continue to do so in the years to come. This is a fact we cannot change. What we can determine instead is our approach, the way we decide to interact with and look at these materials. This will shape the future of the home movie archive, but also of a broader field of research that deals with such non-formalised practices. Opening these archives to the world means opening our mind to looser and more practical ways of investigation that are in line with the very nature of these materials and render aesthetic experience more inclusive and participative. Arts-based practice is essential in this process, as it gives form to things that might be unthinkable without the act of giving form to them. This thesis represents a modest step in the direction of this broader vision.

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