

## Sharing Mobile, Portable and Personal Travel Stories: From “I was *there*” to “*I* was there.”

Gerda Cammaer

### Abstract

The purpose of this article is to offer a preliminary exploration of the similarities and differences between historical and contemporary travelogue practices of tourists by comparing some aspects of the travel behaviour and film culture of two generations, the boomers and the millennials. It focuses, in particular, on how amateur travel films have evolved stylistically and conceptually since the era when they were shot on small analogue film cameras (8mm and Super-8mm film) to recent videos of the “genre” shot on small, portable digital cameras and android devices. By comparing the travel films of these two generations, this article explores the ways in which mobile media has reinvigorated questions about the formation and proliferation of the tourist gaze. It also discusses how amateur travel films offer an alternative to hegemonic forms in film by demonstrating techniques and practices used by amateur filmmakers that are discouraged by professionals of the corporate media. Lastly, it explores how sharing travel stories is different now that the notion of community is at the heart of the internet, and home movies are not just for the home anymore.

**Keywords:** Travel, tourism, tourist gaze, home movies, mobile media, digital media, Baby boomers, Millennials

*Few activities as are as “collectible” or as cinematographically inspiring as travel (Orgeron, 2006, p. 77).*

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to offer a preliminary exploration of the similarities and differences between historical and contemporary travelogue practices of tourists by comparing some aspects of the travel behaviour and film culture of two generations, the boomers and the millennials, or in more pejorative terms, the “me generation” (Twenge, 2006) and the “#me generation”.<sup>1</sup> It focuses, in particular, on how amateur travel films have evolved stylistically and conceptually since the era when they were shot on small analogue film cameras (8mm and Super-8mm) to recent videos of the “genre” shot on small, portable digital cameras and android devices. By comparing the travel films of these two generations, this article explores the ways in which mobile media has reinvigorated questions about the formation and proliferation of the tourist gaze. It also discusses how amateur travel films offer an alternative to hegemonic forms in film by demonstrating techniques and practices used by amateur filmmakers that are discouraged by professionals of the corporate media. Lastly, it offers some insights into how sharing travel stories is different now that the notion of community is at the heart of the internet and home movies are not just for the home anymore.

The underlying premise of this article is that amateur films and home movies help to shed light on how media texts interact with and inform human experiences, including travel. It builds on the assumption that it is possible to draw a direct connection between the analogue amateur travel films of the late 1950s, 60s and 70s, and contemporary digital travel films shot on small point-and-shoot cameras and mobile devices. As Max Schleser (2009) noted, “mobile devices make the mundane interesting, the everyday confronted, providing a new lens for viewing the world through a new camera vision” (p. 119). The 8mm camera had a similar effect in the 1950s, when it became a common tool for tourists and travellers, and this was even more the case in 1965, when the Super-8 camera was introduced with an easy-to-use cartridge loading system. Thanks to this new user-friendliness, everyman was a cameraman, comparable to how today every cellphone user is also a cameraman.

Research for this study draws on a sample of a hundred archival amateur travel films and a hundred recent amateur travel films available online, examined in 2014. The archival films were randomly selected from the Travel Film Archive (<http://www.travelfilmarchive.com>) and from the home movies of the McAfee family, posted on Vimeo (<https://vimeo.com/album/2615737>). The sample of contemporary travel videos online was obtained by using the following search terms: travel, tourism, home movie, amateur film, mobile, iPhone, iPhonography, android camera, GoPro camera, plane, train, road trip, holiday (“cruise ship” was excluded from the search) and some specific names of places that corresponded with locations that appeared frequently in the historical films (such as Paris and Brazil). Since the focus of this

---

<sup>1</sup> I use this term inspired by the descriptors scholars use for how selfies permeate the social media landscape. For example, Eric B. Weiser, who studied the link between narcissism as a predictor of selfie-posting frequency, states that Instagram hosts over 238 million photographs hashtagged with #selfie and 126 million hashtagged with #me (Weiser, 2015, p. 477).

article is on the “amateur” qualities of travel films, personal travel videos shot with GoPro cameras that are either commercial videos that have adopted the “amateur” look or are amateur videos that were sponsored by the camera company, were disregarded.

For clarity purposes, the scope of this research is limited to travel for pleasure and to distant, intercontinental or overseas travel. Thus, it excludes business travellers, as well as commuters, foreign visitors, soldiers, explorers, missionaries, settlers and pilgrims who are all avid travellers of sorts. In other words, the terms “travellers” and “travel,” as they are used in this article, are meant to imply “tourists” and “tourism.”

## **The Tourist Gaze**

Exploration and adventure have always been important features of travel. Tourists have many different reasons for seeing the world, but most travel to experience something different from their everyday lives, in search of the exotic. As Berger (2004) suggests, the “exotic” represents the most distant polarity of the everyday that is some combination of remote, unusual, different, foreign, charming, fascinating, enchanting, distant in time, and intriguing (p. 33). How tourists observe, photograph and film the exotic is the object of study for gaze theories – predominantly known as the “tourist gaze.”

Focusing on the gaze highlights how tourism is fundamentally visual in nature, organised around a location’s aesthetic qualities (see also the term “sightseeing”). This mirrors the general privileging of the eye within the history of Western societies (Urry & Larsen, 2001, p. 18). People look at the world through a particular filter of ideas, skills, desires and expectations, framed by social class, gender, nationality, age and education. All this is reflected in the images they shoot when travelling the world.

As Urry and Larsen (2001) emphasise, the tourist gaze is not a simple reflection of the world; it shapes and classifies, it constantly changes and develops, and it is conditioned by the images of a place that circulates in the media (p. 2). There are signs that the tourist gaze is gradually becoming more global and multicultural, and recent tourism research has begun to study tourism from emerging world regions. Yet, most modern travel videos still conform to what Annette Pritchard and Nigel Morgan (2000) have pointed out, namely that the image of tourism represented by the media still assumes a specific type of tourist – white, Western, male, and heterosexual – privileging the gaze of the “master subject” over others because those behind the lens are also predominately male, white, and Western (pp. 884 – 905). While these dominant media images still create a superficial view of tourists and tourist places, with the diversification of media and platforms this is now competing with the content of the more diverse online travel communities that provide an engaging environment for travellers and tourists to connect and share their own travel experiences. Various online travel communities are developing fast, as it has become easier than ever to travel the world online, and the Web is “becoming our collective travel square” (Wang, Yu and Fesenmaier, 2002, p. 407). More and more travellers are turning to online travel communities to fulfill their travel related needs, such as seeking travel information and tips, or to watch other people’s travel videos.

Berger discusses how some gaze theorists suggest that the development of social media and the availability of digital cameras have caused a change in tourist behaviour, away from seeking direct interactions with people in foreign places and towards capturing sights on photo or video. This position emphasises the idea that, in general, tourists have become primarily concerned with “visually arresting places and with photographing them” (Berger, 2004, p. 25). In other words, the visited place has become secondary to its photographic potential, which, in turn, has an impact on the tourist experience (Berger, 2004 p. 27). While this theory is the subject of debate in the literature about tourism because it is simplistic and reductionistic (it ignores the fact that natives and tourists always interact in some way), in most of the online travel videos studied here, tourists do seem to be increasingly more interested in filming or photographing the places they visit than experiencing them. A telling example is a video of a tourist in Paris who tries to film a harp player on Montmartre, but is constantly interrupted by other tourists filming the same scene and the surroundings on their cellphones.<sup>2</sup> This particular video also illustrates another aspect of how digital cameras have transformed the way people experience travel by offering an immediate look at the images that have been captured. Instant playback was not possible with analogue cameras. Thus, one can observe how the present day tourist spends more time staring at their cameras than at the sites they are visiting. One could also argue that in today’s world, every experience, unique or not, seems to require photo documentation and sharing via social media and that, therefore, *all* experiences are tinted with a touristic gaze.



*Figure 1.* Screen capture from the ending of *Holiday in Paris* by Roald van Dijken (2014).

---

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzPo1hcK0vo>

## **Amateur Travel Films**

Travel films have been produced since as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> The best-known travel films are the typical travel documentaries known as travelogues, adventure, or exploration films that were often presented as a lecture (Ruoff, 2002, pp. 91 – 114).<sup>4</sup> Examples of famous travel lecturers are André de la Varre (1902-1989), Burton Holmes (1870-1958) and James A. Fitzpatrick (1894-1980). These types of travel films were, as Lois Kuter (1975) writes, "in a twilight zone of being neither academic in nature nor pure entertainment" (p. 64). Travelogues are often credited for helping to cultivate the interest in travel, but are rarely recognised for their role in the development of the film medium. However, all travel films are an intrinsic form of cinema that blurs the distinctions between genres and offers an alternative to documentary film (Ruoff, 2002, p. 2). Amateur travel films are a particular mode of filmmaking altogether, because they combine the intrinsic technical and stylistic qualities of amateur and home movies with the particular content that filming travel brings out.

From the late 1950s, there was a steady increase in the production of travel home movies as small lightweight cameras were made available to every interested film amateur and also because there was more leisure time to travel.<sup>5</sup> These home movies capture travel and tourism in a less structured and nonentrepreneurial way than semi-professional travel films. Devin Orgeron (2006), who studied two collections of post-war travel home movies, determined that home movies exhibit a spontaneous type of snap-shooting, a form of "moment collecting" that defies "the era's prescriptive logic as it was promoted in how-to manuals and instruction booklets" (p. 79). He describes how in historical travel and vacation amateur cinematography there is an "impulse to collect the world and to resist, sometimes defiantly, the systematic or the 'orderly' as it was being defined in classical cinema" and that the reason for this is that "travel appears to impose its own order, which runs counter to the logic being sold to the amateur enthusiast" (p. 77).

The various technical guidelines offered to the film amateur, such as aiming for narrative continuity in shooting and editing, were intended to give amateur films a

---

<sup>3</sup> Many of the early Lumière films were travel films.

<sup>4</sup> Most research on travel films is about travelogues and limited to the early decades of cinema. See Tom Gunning, *The Whole World Within Reach: Travel Images without Borders*; Rick Altman, *From Lecturer's Prop to Industrial Product: The Early History of Travel Films*, and André Gaudreault and Germain Lacasse (Eds.). *The Moving Picture Lecturer*. Special issue. *Iris: A Journal of Theory on Image and Sound*, 22 (15), Fall 1996. Jeffrey Ruoff (2006) helped to address this issue in *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel*, discussing the importance of travelogues beyond silent cinema and showing how travel film lectures remained a popular form of entertainment into the late 1970s and early 1980s.

<sup>5</sup> This research departs from the many studies about the semi-professional travel films. It intersects more with scholarship on the history and aesthetics of home movies such as Richard Chalfen's *Snapshot Versions of Life*; Patricia Zimmermann's *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film*, and Karen Ishizuka and Patricia Zimmermann's *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories*. Particularly informative was an article by Devin Orgeron in *The Moving Image* titled *Mobile Home Movies: Travel and le politique des amateurs*. (Fall 2006).

more professional appearance. Richard Chalfen (1986), an authority on home movies and home movie aesthetics, examined several manuals on “how to make better home movies” and compared what they presented to be “ideal” to authentic home movies. He noted that many guidebooks first mock the naïve moviemaking habits of untrained film amateurs, and then use this as their argument to impose standards on how to do things “right” (p. 62). In the 1950s and 60s, this was part of the pervasive call to professionalise and homogenise amateur cinema, or, as Orgeron (2006) states, an attempt to take the “amateur” out of amateur cinematography (p. 85). Kodak (1953), in its popular magazine *How to Make Good Movies*, for example, warned the amateur not to “panoram” on stationary landscapes, as this will result in “boring” pictures.<sup>6</sup>

Contrary to my experience, it is a common belief that home movies are boring. This can be attributed to the fact that most analogue home movies are silent and not edited. Another reason is that spectators who were not involved in the making of the film or part of its original environment cannot participate in its original meaning. Hence, they see the images in a different light. Jeffrey Ruoff (1991) explains how watching a stranger’s home movies can be uncomfortable for the intimacy it reveals and, above all, requires a lot of patience as “outsiders see only the visual surface of the events depicted, not their emotional substance” (p. 12). This sentiment is acted out in a 1950 spoof on amateur travel films produced by the American Automobile Association to promote their travel packages to Europe. This 25 minute film titled *Have Camera, Did Travel* opens with a husband and wife telling another married couple about their recent trip to Europe. The husband pulls out a screen to project his travel movie, and immediately the wife of the secondary couple warns her husband not to leave because if she has to “suffer through it,” so does he. The film goes on to parody the couple’s vacation footage.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 2. Two screen captures from *Have Camera, Did Travel*, AAA promotional film from the 1950s.

<sup>6</sup> Boring images, was/is considered a general characteristic of many home movies. See Schultz & Schultz’s *How To Make Exciting Home Movies and Stop Boring Your Friends and Relatives* (1973), (also cited in Richard Chalfen, 1986; p.59).

<sup>7</sup> See <http://travelfilmarchive.com/item.php?id=12338&clip=n&num=10&keywords=have+camera+will+travel&startrow=10>

As it was made for publicity, *Have Camera, Did Travel* is a well-produced, edited film with the inclusion of titles and commentary. Although there are jokes about the (so-called) amateur quality of images in the film, overall there are hardly any shooting errors or glitches that are often present in unedited home movies (characteristics that have contributed to the dismissal of the genre as an important chapter in film history).

An actual amateur travel film titled *Paris 1965*, on the other hand, demonstrates a common “mistake” made by amateur filmmakers in a scene that attempts to capture a woman boarding a plane. First, three men climb the stairs to the plane. Then, the shot jumps to a woman already at the top of the stairs, waiting to be filmed entering the plane. Because the cameraperson forgot to crank the camera, there is an obvious gap in the sequence, and the woman is never shown climbing the stairs. The error is emphasised by another passenger waiting to board the plane so as to not interfere with the shot.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 3. Two screen captures of an 1960s amateur travel film, *Boarding an Air France Boeing 707 at Orly Airport, Paris, France in 1965*.

The shooting style of amateur films is often unconventional, as amateur filmmakers tend to operate according to their own logic. Orgeron (2006) observed that contrary to the programmatic approach promoted by film professionals, the free-spirited amateur ventures fearlessly into the “danger zones” of travel films: panoramic shots, shots from moving vehicles, still or “action-free” compositions, and the dreaded postcard aesthetic. The fact that this happens so consistently indicates a strong opposition to the attempts of the industry and its experts to standardise and professionalise amateur cinematography (p. 85). Undoubtedly, amateurs largely ignored professional advice, and that remains the case today.

Amateur travel filmmakers, both former and current, do not follow the hegemonic formulas of documentary or fiction film. This is obvious by the refusal of home-moviemakers to follow the most basic rule; never shoot from a moving vehicle. Travelling shots, also known as tracking shots, are the most prominent characteristic of the amateur travel film aesthetic. Travelling shots symbolise not only the trajectory

---

<sup>8</sup> See [http://travelfilmarchive.com/item.php?id=12680&subject\\_id=1&startrow=0&keywords=Air+Travel](http://travelfilmarchive.com/item.php?id=12680&subject_id=1&startrow=0&keywords=Air+Travel)

of travel, but also the experience of movement that is inherent to travel. They embody the recurrent fascination with (improved and increased) mobility and go hand in hand with shots of the various modes of transportation that make travel possible (cars, buses, trains, planes), another feature of amateur travel films that is still present.<sup>9</sup> An important motif for all amateur travel filmmakers is finding exciting ways to exhibit their freedom to travel.

Generally speaking, amateur travel films function as a way of stating "I was there," similar to what sending postcards used to do; they are indexical in nature. The films implicitly reflect the amateur's belief in the ability of small format film equipment to capture the world, and to bring it home as visual memories. Contrary to the home movie guidebooks that systematically dismiss the postcard aesthetic, many amateur travel filmmakers are dedicated tourists with an eye for visually pleasing or interesting scenes. Kuter (1975) notes that:

*The ability to depict contrasts in scenery, life styles, levels of antiquity and modernity, as well as types of people, of any place in the world is important to the travel filmer (sic) who believes that diversity is in itself valuable and who enjoys showing audiences new places and differing aspects of living. (p. 7)*

Amateur travel filmmakers who also include social content in their films operate more like social anthropologists or documentary filmmakers. But, contrary to professional social documentaries, amateur films of this kind always depict the pleasurable and beautiful aspects of the world.

Travel home movies, as well, persistently show us the "sunny side of life" (Chalfen, 1986, p. 105). Their main purpose is to capture and preserve how it felt to be on holiday – an image that will transport viewers back to the pleasure and freedom they experienced on their trip. A good example is a 1964 home movie about a trip to Rio de Janeiro. Besides various postcard shots (many on the beach), there are the typical travelling shots and panoramic views. Among the many images of local people, there are some that show a woman clearly of special interest to the cameraperson.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> One can easily draw a parallel from the emergence of the 8mm camera as a consumer recording device and the growing convenience and popularity of air travel in the postwar era to the recent emergence of pocket-size shooting devices, the development of iPhotography, or lightweight digital cameras such as the GoPro cameras. Point-and-shoot cameras also coincide with an exponential growth in air travel in the last decade and a greater mobility altogether. For an overview see the increased numbers of departures by outbound tourists by country noted by the World Bank between 2010 and 2014 <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.DPRT>

<sup>10</sup> See <http://travelfilmarchive.com/item.php?id=12280&keywords=rio+de+janeiro&startrow=10>





Figure 4. Two screen captures from a home movie shot on a visit to Rio de Janeiro in 1964.

It happens that in the pursuit of capturing that perfect “postcard aesthetic,” certain biases can cause footage to become insensitive, even offensive. The amateur filmmakers’ fascination with the exotic and with shots that establish the “otherness” of a location can result in voyeuristic films that reveal sexist or racist views. The amateur aesthetic usually exposes the privileged position of tourists as people with the means and the opportunity to travel, but who do not necessarily have the experience or the education to “frame” their experiences. According to Heather Nicholson (1997), a close reading of historical amateur travel footage “may reveal positionality, ideas and identities, hint at how aesthetic taste becomes refined and discloses the ideological and subjective meanings found within representations of place” (pp. 199 - 212).<sup>11</sup> It is essential to be mindful of these ethnocentric biases when looking at amateur films about tourist encounters with foreign cultures on international and transcontinental trips, then and now (see below).

Further subjectivity present in many amateur travel films is the inclusion or exclusion of fellow travellers by the person controlling the camera.<sup>12</sup> While it is a main feature of analogue home movies shot at home or on holidays to have family members pose for the camera or film them “in action” (swimming, playing, blowing candles on a cake, dancing, etc.), in most of the analogue travel films surveyed for this study, the partner (usually the wife), children, or friends appear in the frame only occasionally. Apparently analogue amateur travel filmmakers considered the places they visited to be so precious that, given the little footage they had to shoot while on a trip, the tourist locations and attractions had priority over the people they travelled with. A

---

<sup>11</sup> The vast majority of home movies are filmed by men. A good example is the McAfee home movie about Paris #2: <https://vimeo.com/album/2615737/video/80392205>. Note also how at about 3 minutes 12 seconds the cameraperson accidentally films another person filming the same boulevard, and quickly zooms in to cut that person out of the image.

<sup>12</sup> In historic amateur films, it was usually the father who filmed. See Patricia Zimmermann (1988) op. cit.: 32. As Norris describes, occasionally in home movies:  
Control over the camera is handed over as the film-maker steps into view. Seeing through someone else’s cinematic gaze, even briefly, may disclose some of the subjectivities that shape filmic images. The visual encodings of femininity, domesticity, family relations and responses are exposed when spectator and object exchange roles. (Heather Norris Nicholson, op. cit.: 202)

simple explanation for this (pointed out earlier in this article) is that the tourist gaze is focused on what is visually out-of-the-ordinary – what is different, what is “other” – not what is known, familiar and/or the same as at home. Illustrative of this is another home movie shot in Paris from 1965 where “the wife” leisurely walks into the frame and within seconds “the husband” lifts the camera to cut the woman out and focus solely on a building at the far end of the square.<sup>13</sup>



Figure 5. Two screen captures of a home movie shot in Paris, France in 1965.

It is here that one notices the greatest change in content between older and newer amateur travel films and a major shift in how people explore the world and position themselves as travellers. In contemporary travel videos, friends and partners feature in almost every single shot, and the filmmakers themselves indulge in shooting numerous “selfies” all over the world, confirming the fact that the millennials are an even more narcissistic generation than the boomers.<sup>14</sup> In the historical footage, it seems it was enough to simply capture images of a tourist site to proclaim to others that the traveller had been there (after all, they filmed or photographed it). Now, however, people state the obvious by posing in the picture themselves. The question is: is this behaviour still about documentary evidence, showing proof that “I was there” or is it (only) about showing off, stating that “I was there”?

## From Tourist Gazing to Navel Gazing

An extreme example of the prevalence of selfies by travellers online is a video titled *Modern Motorcycle Diaries*. Inspired by Ché Guevara’s *Motorcycle Diaries*, this is the compressed account of a young man travelling around the world for 360 days on a motorcycle with a GoPro camera on a stick. Inspired by the 360 day timeline, Alex Chacon filmed 360 degree panoramic shots (a typical feature of the amateur travel film despite Kodak magazine’s warnings against it), but with the camera positioned so that he did not film the sights, but himself with the sights as a background. The video is an ever-evolving “mise-en-scene” upon which he acted (literally) with the

<sup>13</sup> See <http://travelfilmarchive.com/item.php?id=12679&keywords=paris>

<sup>14</sup> Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell found that in terms of narcissism, the boomers, a generation famous for being self-absorbed, were outdone by their children, and that the upswing in narcissism accelerated between 2000 and 2006 (Twenge & Campbell, 2009, pp. 30-31).

world as his stage (edited to the song *A Beautiful Life* by Tim McMorris). This could have been an incredibly interesting travel movie if only Chacon had turned the camera 180 degrees, giving spectators a(n) (unobstructed) view of all the locations and vistas, instead. Moreover, many of the images in this video that feature local people prove how an amateur filmmaker’s fascination with capturing the “otherness” of a location can result in voyeuristic films that reveal certain sexist and cultural biases.<sup>15</sup>



Figure 6. Screen capture of *The Modern Motorcycle Diaries* webpage.



Figure 7. Screen capture of *The Modern Motorcycle Diaries* on Youtube.

The issues related to selfies taken by people travelling were addressed in an article by Beth Harpaz (2014) published in the *Toronto Star* that argued that selfies are distracting, at times inappropriate, and can even pose a safety risk. The title of the

---

<sup>15</sup> See Part 1 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTIXttQL\\_Yk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTIXttQL_Yk) and Part 2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sR6Kaq526Zc>

article suggests “teens [are] too busy taking ‘narcissistic’ selfies, to really experience travel.” The story tells of a group of teenagers who travelled to the Galapagos Islands, famous for its exotic wildlife. Yet, the only interest the teens showed was in trying to take as many selfies as possible (“a selfie fest”), ignoring all the natural beauty around them. They were so busy on social media, trying to get as many “likes” as possible on their photos, that they did not experience or enjoy the Islands. The article also discusses the case of the so-called Auschwitz Selfie Girl, a young woman who posted a selfie smiling at the infamous concentration camp. She became the target of a media storm and even received death treats when her images went viral. There was a logical explanation for her smile: she was celebrating having made it there on her own, after her father died. It was a tribute to him, as their plan was to go to Auschwitz together.<sup>16</sup>

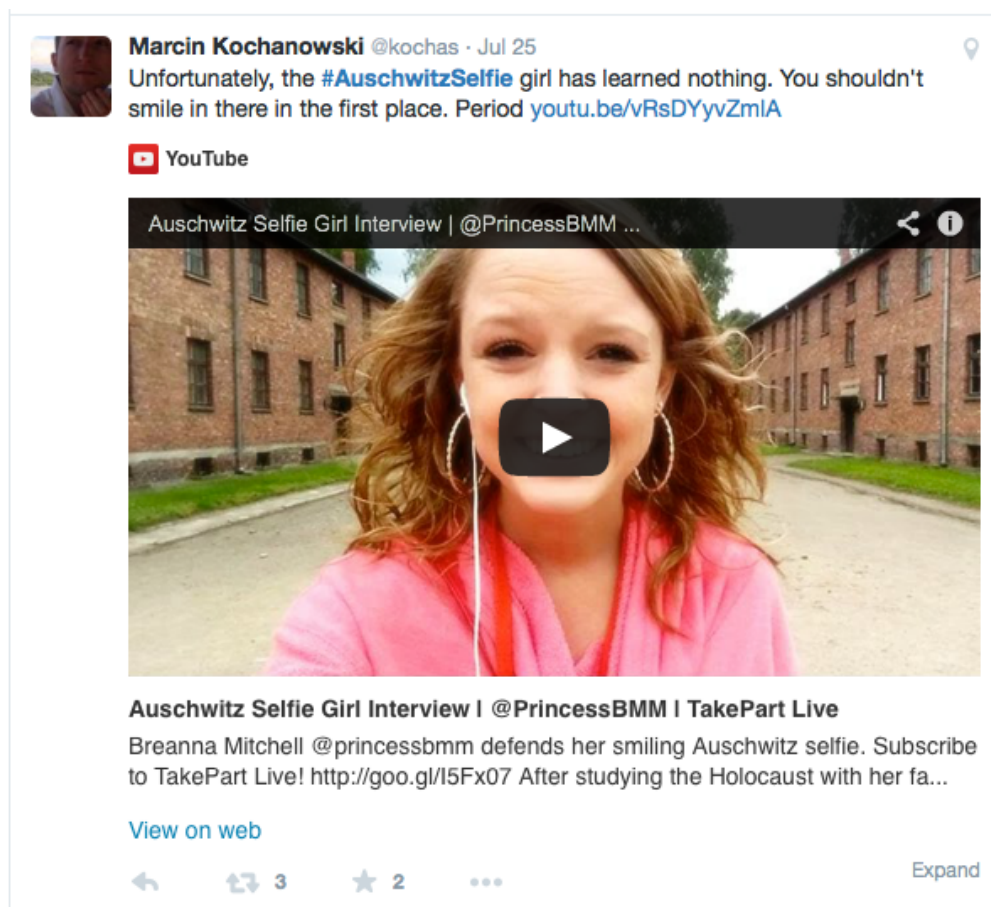


Figure 8. Screenshot of comments on YouTube at the occasion of an interview with the “Auschwitz Selfie Girl.”

Although not as problematic as these two case studies, many amateur travel films online suffer from a prevalence of selfie-imagery, sometimes ad nauseum. A video by backpackers travelling in Costa Rica in 2014 demonstrates this point clearly. There are some shots of wildlife and scenery. Yet, the majority of images (again) showcase

<sup>16</sup> See [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/24/auschwitz-selfie-girl-breanna-mitchell\\_n\\_5618225.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/24/auschwitz-selfie-girl-breanna-mitchell_n_5618225.html) and <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/07/22/the-other-side-of-the-infamous-auschwitz-selfie/>

the travellers –not the places travelled– taken with the help of the popular selfie-stick.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 9. Screen capture of a recent backpackers travel video shot in Costa Rica.

The pervasiveness of selfies and self-portraiture in recent amateur travel films can be explained by one of the most common characteristics attributed to the millennial generation: narcissism, “a personality trait marked by grandiosity and egocentrism, and by the constant pursuit of veneration by others” (Weiser, 2015, p. 477).<sup>18</sup> In search of the psychological meaning of selfie postings (as photos), Weiser puts the assumptions that selfies “inherently contain the most explicit elements of ostentation and self-propagation” (Weiser, 2015, p. 477) to the test:

*Indeed, selfies have been described as ‘a symptom of social media-driven narcissism’ (Pearlman, 2013, para. 20), reflecting the intuitive assumption that the taking and posting of such photographs constitute self-promoting gambits by the self-absorbed. Empirically, however, selfie posting and its association with narcissism has been largely unexplored. (Weiser, 2015, p. 477)*

With his survey, Weiser was able to support the findings from other investigations that posting selfies “represents an avenue through which narcissistic needs are expressed through social media”, but he also warns that “this should be nuanced as this obscures which narcissism facets are driving this behaviour” (p. 480), such as the variables he used to conduct his study: leadership and authority, exhibitionism,

---

<sup>17</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nj0AIWb8Ei0>

<sup>18</sup> Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell note in *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (2009) that the trend toward narcissism (in America) has been building for a long time. They specify that “almost every trait related to narcissism rose between the 1950s and 90s, including assertiveness, dominance, extravertism, self-esteem, and individualistic focus” (pp. 32-33). Further they state that “in addition—we can’t stress this enough—young people didn’t raise themselves. They got these narcissistic values from somewhere, often from their parents or media messages created by older people” (pp. 33-34).

entitlement and exploitativeness, as well as gender differences. In short, Weisner shows how posting selfies is a form of self-expression that carries with it social and psychological meaning, and that "selfies tell us something important about those who share them and, as such, offer valuable insights into the uses of social media in general" (Weiser, 2015, p. 480).

Besides being self-centred and overconfident, millennials are adapting quickly to a world undergoing rapid technological change. Generally speaking, millennials are empowered technology savvy individuals who use technology for their own purposes. They do not hesitate to compete with large corporations, challenge conventions, and come up with innovative ways of doing things. Millennials are making and enjoying enormously successful small films (evidenced by the number of hits, likes and site comments), including many travel videos. While traditionally showing travel images to family and friends followed returning home after a trip, the digital age has created a new reality. Travel photo and video sharing is no longer a private endeavour, shared by a small audience known well by the person. Instead it has become a much larger social event, and an instantaneous one; sharing travel experiences can be done within moments of photographing or filming them.

## **Digital Wayfarers**

Larissa Hjorth and Sara Pink (2013) have coined the term "digital wayfarer" as a way to think about the perpetually moving mobile media user and the new everyday visualities that are developing as a result.<sup>19</sup> This is a particularly useful concept for studying modern travel films. Hjorth and Pink describe several cases where users make "playful pictures on the move" and then (auto-) comment on how users perceive their travel activities (in digital dialogues, travel blogs and travel vlogs). These are not merely movements from one place to another, nor are these in-between-places. Digital wayfarers consider moments of travel as sites for active creativity and they embrace camera phone images as an integral part of being on the move.

"Spaces like trains are no longer about a transitory in-between-space whereby the destination is the most important place; rather, spaces like trains become incubators for the wayfarer. They become *copresence* rather than *colocation*."<sup>20</sup>

Although Hjorth and Pink do not speak specifically about amateur travel films, their ideas resonate with one of the more prevalent characteristics of the genre, both now and in the past; the importance for travellers to record the journey, the modes of transport used, their own mobility and the sense of freedom when travelling. The

---

<sup>19</sup> For a good overview of how mobile filmmaking has evolved, see Max Schleser. (2013). From 'Script to Screen' to 'Sh%t N Share'. In J. Daniels, C. McLaughin, & G. Pearce (Eds.), *Truth, Dare or Promise: Art and Documentary Revisited* (pp. 93-111). Cambridge, Newcastle. (Among others)

<sup>20</sup> They borrow the term "copresence" from digital humanities specialist Anne Beaulieu who used it to describe new ways to obtain (ethnographic) knowledge that no longer requires to be "in the field" because now it is possible to "be present" by using new media. See: Beaulieu, A. (2010, June). From Co-Location to Co-presence: Shifts in the Use of Ethnography for the Study of Knowledge. *Social Studies of Science*, 40 (3), 453-470.

difference is that while the analogue wayfarer was limited in what shots to include in their film (which could only be seen after the fact, upon their return home), digital wayfarers are unrestrained and can share their travels instantaneously with a network of family and friends online. They treat the time spent physically travelling (on buses and trains, etc.) as creative moments, not just to record images, but also to edit them, put them to music or provide commentary. By posting these moments, they keep their entire community involved in their travels.

## **A New Style?**

Looking at how amateur travel films have evolved stylistically, there are both similarities and differences between historical and contemporary accounts. Besides the dominance of self-portraiture, travel films of the millennial generation show more close-ups and extreme close-ups, the use of special lenses (fish-eye and extreme wide-angle lenses), special effects and the use of filters (including filters to give their images an "old" look of analogue Super-8 film). All of the films examined in this study have sound (while most older amateur films are silent), most are put to music (popular songs) and they are edited (a lot of quick and rhythmic editing). Also new is the fascination with time-lapse photography (much easier to achieve in digital), underwater filming (snorkel videos with the GoPro camera), and very quick camera movements (often made smoother thanks to special devices and/or the use of image stabilizers). Similar between the two generations of films are the inclusion of panorama and tracking shots and the prominent use of an observational camera. Another similarity is the preference of filmmakers for sunsets and starry nights (usually better exposed in digital films than in the Super-8 ones), a fascination with nature, animals and wildlife, and the capturing of mobility and movement (images that show travellers being on the road, taking planes, enjoying the freedom of travel).

Some of the biases of older travel films persist (the same ethnocentric filters) and most tourist films are still blind to the reality of the places visited; the world shown is a happy place without troubles, war, poverty or disease (an image constantly reinforced by the tourist industry). Different now is the abundance of videos of couples in love and videos shot on honeymoon trips, but this could very well be the consequence of archivists describing historical honeymoon films not as "travel films", thus obscuring them as examples of amateur travel films. Generally, the young travellers of today are still privileged people, as many can afford adventurous travel to remote places (which is sometimes commented on by viewers online, e.g. comments on *The Modern Motorcycle Diaries* YouTube page). It is also more difficult today to distinguish between commercially produced videos that adopt an "amateur" style and "true" amateur films. A lot of the films about travel on the Internet are sponsored, but that is not always made obvious. This is easier to detect in historical footage as it was usually stated in either the title or the credits of the film. There is also more interest in shooting other people filming, and a general obsession with the camera itself, to the point that many tourists see the world more on the display of their camera than with the naked eye. Besides all these differences, the most important change, by far, is the new connectivity generated by the use of social media and the instantaneous sharing of still and moving travel images online – Home movies are not just for the home anymore.

## Conclusion

What is interesting about amateur or home movies, and especially travel films, lies in their diversity, individuality and particularity. The two generations, the boomers and the millennials, share a similar “*unruliness of the amateur*” (Orgeron, 2006). Comparing travel home movies of the 1950s, 60s and 70s to professional filmmaking standards of the time shows an enviable autonomy of the analogue amateur filmmaker to indulge their (costly) hobby for personal interest, family interest, social diversion and to occasionally share the results with a wider audience. There is a certain sense of freedom that is reflected in the way travel is captured in analogue amateur films. This freedom accounts for some of the remarkable footage that is now swelling archives in many countries, and it is this freedom that also characterises what the millennials are doing with digital and mobile technologies. A new set of rules for “How to make a short film with your smart phone” recommends never using it in portrait mode, dismissively labelled the “vertical video syndrome” (Singal, 2012). Meanwhile, several mobile phone videos online do this without hesitation, and with success (see, for instance, two other amateur videos of the same harp player on Montmartre in Paris, mentioned in figure 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKMqcDsSKrl> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wofpAcW9e3M>).

CNET > Mobile > Phones > Never shoot a vertical video with your iPhone again

## Never shoot a vertical video with your iPhone again

Know someone who suffers from Vertical Video Syndrome? Gift them this app and help them shake the bad habit!

by Jason Cipriani @MrCippy / January 16, 2014 4:10 PM PST

[Dribbble](#) / [Facebook](#) / [Twitter](#) / [LinkedIn](#) / [StumbleUpon](#) / [more](#)

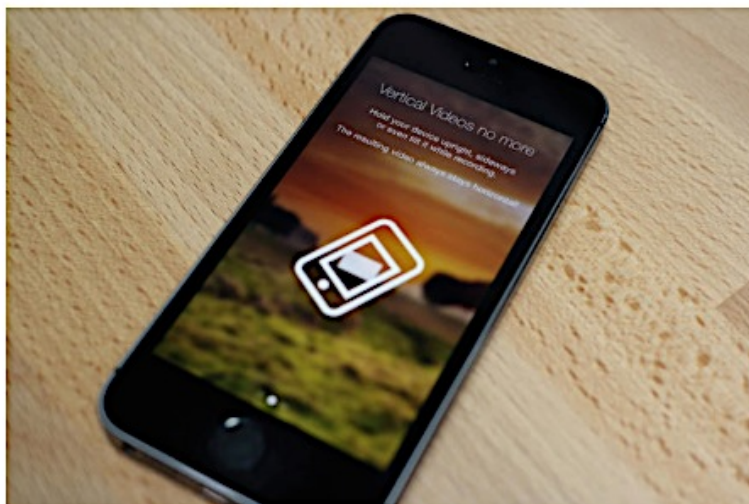


Figure 10. Example of new, updated “how-to” film guidelines.

While the most important motif in analogue amateur travel films was “I was *there*”, the millennial generation is filming their travels to state “*I* was there.” This is mirrored in the more personal style of recording travel images and the constant inclusion of selfies, despite all the negative connotations of extreme narcissism and exhibitionism



that come with it. Who knows what the boomers would have done if they were not limited by the 3 minute time span of an 8mm film roll, the cost, and the trouble of carrying film stock while travelling, and if they had similar worldwide platforms on which to share their travel albums as the millennials do? For the #me generation, the Web is their collective travel square, and for them any travel experience is best measured in likes rather than miles.

## **Acknowledgements**

Many thanks to Ed Slopek and Alexandra Jokinen for their valuable help and critical feedback.

## References

- Berger, A. (2004). *Deconstructing travel: Cultural perspectives on tourism*. Walnut Creek, CA.: Altamira Press.
- Chalfen, R. (1986). Media myopia and genre-centrism: The case of home movies. *Journal of Film and Video*, summer/Fall 1986; 62.
- Eastman Kodak Company. *How to make good movies; a non-technical handbook for those considering the ownership of an amateur movie camera and for those already actively engaged in movie making who want to improve the interest and quality of their personal film records*. (1938). Rochester, NY: Eastman Kodak.
- Harpaz, B. (November 16, 2014). Teens too busy taking 'narcissistic' selfies to really experience travel. *Toronto Star*. Retrieved from [http://www.thestar.com/life/parent/2014/08/01/teens\\_too\\_busy\\_taking\\_narcissistic\\_selfies\\_to\\_really\\_experience\\_travel\\_adult\\_critics\\_say.html](http://www.thestar.com/life/parent/2014/08/01/teens_too_busy_taking_narcissistic_selfies_to_really_experience_travel_adult_critics_say.html)
- Hjorth, L., & Pink, S. (2013). New visualities and the digital wayfarer: Reconceptualizing camera phone photography and locative media. *Mobile Media & Communication*, 40-57.
- Kuter, L. (1975). Take me to paradise: The travel film and the real world. *Folklore Forum and Special Series #13, Saying Cheese: Studies in Folklore and Visual Communication*, 1975; 63-75.
- Nicholson, H. (1997). Archives and sources. In *amateur hands: Framing time and space in home-movies*. *History Workshop Journal*, 199-212.
- Orgeron, D. (2006). Mobile home movies: Travel and le politique des amateurs. *The Moving Image*, 6 (2), 74-100.
- Pritchard, A., & Morgan, N. (2000). Privileging the male gaze. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 884-905.
- Ruoff, J. (1991). Home movies of the avant-garde: Jonas Mekas and the New York art world. *Cinema Journal*, 6.
- Ruoff, J. (2002). Around the world in eighty minutes: The travel lecture film. *Visual Anthropology*, 91-114.
- Schleser, M., Baker C., & Molga, K. (2009). Aesthetics of mobile media art. *Journal of Media Practice*, 101-122.
- Singal, H. (June 6, 2012). How to make a short film with your smartphone. *Business Today*. Retrieved from: <http://www.businesstoday.in/gadget/mobiles/smartphone-short-film-shoot/story/184451.html>

- Twenge, J. M. (2006). *Generation Me: Why today’s young Americans are more confident, assertive, entitled—and more miserable than ever*. New York: Free Press.
- Twenge, J. M., & Campbell, W. K. (2009). *The narcissism epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*. New York: Free Press.
- Urry, J., & Larsen, J. (2001). *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*. London: Sage.
- Wang, Y., Yu, Q., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2002). Defining the virtual tourist community: Implications for tourism marketing. *Tourism Management*, 23, 407-417.
- Weiser, E. B. (2015). #Me: Narcissism and its facets as predictors of self-posting frequency. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 86, 477-481.

## List of Figures

<i>Figure 1.</i> Screen capture from the ending of <i>Holiday in Paris</i> by Roald van Dijken (2014). .....	4
<i>Figure 2.</i> Two screen captures from <i>Have Camera, Did Travel</i> , AAA promotional film from the 1950s. ....	6
<i>Figure 3.</i> Two screen captures of an 1960s amateur travel film, <i>Boarding an Air France Boeing 707 at Orly Airport</i> , Paris, France in 1965. ....	7
<i>Figure 4.</i> Two screen captures from a home movie shot on a visit to Rio de Janeiro in 1964. ....	9
<i>Figure 5.</i> Two screen captures of a home movie shot in Paris, France in 1965. ....	10
<i>Figure 6.</i> Screen capture of <i>The Modern Motorcycle Diaries</i> webpage. ....	11
<i>Figure 7.</i> Screen capture of <i>The Modern Motorcycle Diaries</i> on Youtube. ....	11
<i>Figure 8.</i> Screenshot of comments on YouTube at the occasion of an interview with the “Auschwitz Selfie Girl.” .....	12
<i>Figure 9.</i> Screen capture of a recent backpackers travel video shot in Costa Rica. .	13
<i>Figure 10.</i> Example of new, updated “how-to” film guidelines.....	16

## **About the Author**

Gerda Cammaer has degrees in Communication Studies, Film Studies and Film Production. Both as a maker, curator and scholar she specializes in experimental and documentary film. After her Ph.D. thesis (completed in 2010), a research-creation project about the so-called “death of film” and the importance of experimental film practices in times of accelerated technological changes, she directed her attention to various forms of ephemeral cinema and forgotten film histories. She co-edited a book titled *Cinephemera: Archives, Ephemeral Cinema, and New Screen Histories in Canada* (McGill University Press, Fall 2014). Her current research focuses on the revival of microcinema—various low-budget independent short films inspired by the creative possibilities of new moving image technology—and their lineage with historical non-mainstream films and videos. Her fascination for the history and practice of home movies makes her an avid student of how consumer friendly technology and mobile devices challenge the expectations and definitions of documentary film, and how they contribute to the “demythologizing” of the filmmaking process in general. Gerda is Associate Professor at Ryerson University in Toronto, where she teaches in Film Studies (BA), Film and Photography Preservation and Collections Management (MA) and in Documentary Media (MFA).

**Contact:**      [syncope.cam@sympatico.ca](mailto:syncope.cam@sympatico.ca)

**The Journal of Creative Technologies (JCT)**

<https://ctechjournal.aut.ac.nz>

ISSN: 2230-2115

Colab, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY)

All articles published in *The Journal of Creative Technologies (JCT)* from Issue 4 onwards are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY). The copyright of the material remains with the author(s), and third-parties are granted permission to use, shared, and adapted the material, provided the original work is appropriately attributed.

*The Journal of Creative Technologies (JCT)* is an online, open access, peer-reviewed journal for the publication of research and innovation about new technologies, creative practices, and critical theories. The journal aims to explore applied, methodological and theoretical perspectives on emergent technological platforms and strategies through thematically focused issues.

*JCT* is a research communication platform published by Colab at the Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies, Auckland University of Technology.