



Film NOT DEAD

The Fall & Rise of Super 8



“Film Not Dead”
The Fall and Rise of Super 8

One undeniable, unstoppable truth about our existence is the passage of time. No matter what we do or where we find ourselves, we stand in the instantaneity of the present moment, with an unfolding future ahead and an immediate and ever-growing past behind us. In physics, this phenomenon is referred to as the Arrow of Time, meaning we can only go forward, thus never could we undo actions in reverse or move backwards into the past.¹ As we progress through the elusive reality and/or illusion of time, technological advances conceive concrete milestones subject to palpable outcomes. So is also true to the image, finding its tangible birth in prehistoric and ancient paintings, and later in photography and cinema. The window view we prefer to set, see and share is wedded to historical vessels, a *format* currently available at the time that allows the arrangement of its elements for the reconnaissance of others. When in comparison to unrelated areas, art finds its way to bend time and space (in this case to a supporting technology) in an exquisite and rather unique manner. One would not opt for to be examined by an X-ray performed with Crooked Tubes to detect a possible brain tumor but would aspire to access a contemporary technology available like an MRI scanner, for instance, to do so. It is a puzzling attribute of image and sound to bring older technologies to surface, for example, making vinyl records a hip item when more accessible, tinier and even free of charge versions of an album are at hand. Audiovisual formats as historical perception framings are movable, hence breaking the arrow of time by jumping unilinearly from format to format disregarding of the technological advances for the time being and continuously deconstructing and reorganizing the predecessors that initiated them. Cinema embodies today not one but two ways of revamping formats, since it is, by essence, the reposition of individual photographs in order to conceive the illusion of movement and passage of time (a *former* format), but also personifies a materiality revival through the usage of celluloid in a predominant digital era. As one may expect, when newer apparatus (hardware) and up-to-date codes to utilize them (software) have emerged, photographers and cinematographers shift from fashionable formats that operate within the brand-new high tech machinery and mechanization. Heavier and more complex equipment gave space to smaller, easier-to-use cameras reaching different kinds of users. On one hand, professional filmmakers from either entertainment or advertisement fields used widely 35mm cameras and projectors to secure a skilled and competent capture and display of their artworks or projects. On the other hand, a pseudo democratization of the film industry was accomplished over time when smaller film gauges were introduced and commercially distributed.² The search for both accessibility and desirable technical specs such as resolution and compatibility opened filmmaking up to a wide range of independent artists and film enthusiasts and, subsequently, became the promise of the digital image industry offering inexpensive, user-friendly cameras and accessories.

¹ For a friendly induction into physics refer to “String Theory for Dummies” by physicist, philosopher, and educator Andrew Zimmerman Jones (Wiley Publishing, 2010).

² Film gauge determines the width of a celluloid strip and therefore is correlated to the *resolution* or detail the image is capable of bestowing. Some of the most common film gauges used are 8mm, 16mm, and 35mm.

It would make sense, then, to completely discard the old fashioned celluloid and trade it for as many Ks as one could access to for the sake of cheaper battery-power cameras and displays.³ The concept and production of new technology are, after all, for the betterment of the image. However, and this is where the emergent properties of cinema undoubtedly materialize, a growing number of professionals and aficionados are not only keeping film stocks afloat and away from perishment, but they are also the go-to format for both independent and upscale cinematic endeavors.⁴ When speaking about over-the-top grossing Hollywood franchises like *Mission Impossible* it is only glaring to assume that every piece of equipment is handy for production and one would expect for them to use the newest technology available. But even when the most sophisticated state-of-the-art machinery was within reach, the choice was to shoot 90% of the movie on 35mm film. It does, at least, raise the question of why would highly trained professionals embrace an older, supposedly surpassed alternative. *Mission: Impossible – Fallout*'s director Christopher McQuarrie discloses the sentiment behind this choice:

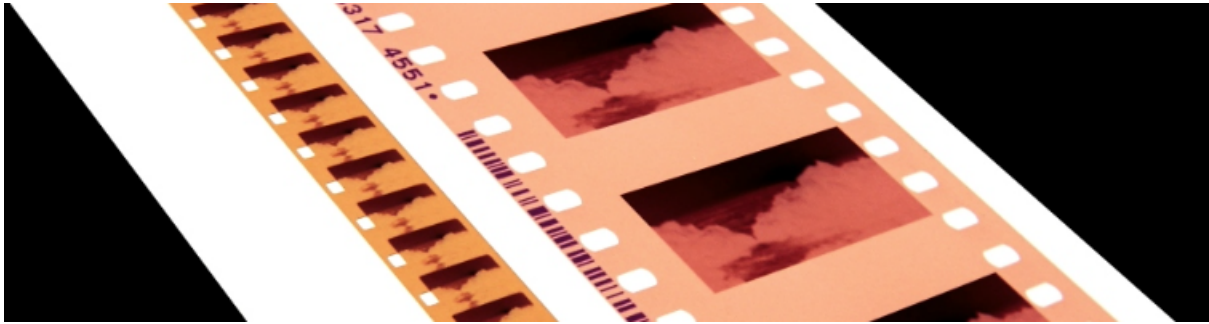
"Movies are dreams, and dreams are not 8K digital - not mine anyway. I am not looking for reality; I'm looking for realism. Most of all, I was looking to create the beautiful, grainy, gauzy look of the films I grew up watching as a child in the 1970s."
(*American Cinematographer* Vol. 99, Numer 9, September 2018, pp. 33)

But shooting on film today is not, as it once and long ago was, just for professionals or in *Fallout*'s case for a cinema of epic proportions. A stable and thriving community of artists, filmmakers, and dilettantes all around the world value, employ and consume the tiniest film gauge accessible: the 8mm film. This points at the issue of celluloid as a choice even further, having in consideration that the spatial resolution in 8mm is lesser than in 16mm or 35mm film, and therefore it offers fewer visible details.⁵ This suggests resolution is not everything at stake after all and that other, probably more important attributes and longings play a significant role when making up one's mind regarding a format.

³ Digital image sensors and displays' resolution is measured by how many pixels it possesses on its horizontal axis times its vertical axis. Nowadays the most common resolutions are SD, 720p, HD, 2K, and 4K. The K at the end means "thousand" and indicates that the resolution is 2.048 pixels on its width for 2K, and 4.096 pixels on its width for 4K. To visually understand the scale of a pixel and how much information fits into these generally known resolutions, see the 3-video series "*Moving a Pixel*" by Dutch duo Lernert & Sander (Vimeo, 2011. Last accessed on Feb. 07th, 2019): <https://vimeo.com/39703764>

⁴ One Emergent property of film would be a frame in succession with others that create a movement which is not existent in a sole frame, and another are properties like colorimetry and exposure latitude which humans can perceive as aesthetic of a film frame or a *framed picture* when merged together.

⁵ Super 8 also offers less shooting material since a cartridge has 50 feet (15mts) which when exposed at 24 fps comes down to 2:30 minutes and when exposed at 18 fps comes down to 3:20 minutes of material. *fps* (frames per second) is the frequency expression for *Framerate* and it measures how many consecutive individual film frames will appear on display.



Super 8mm film strip lies on a light table beside a 35mm illustrating size differences.
Courtesy of Daniel Henriquez-Ilic, 2009

Small gauge film stock was the very genesis of an amateur film system that would revolutionize cinema through the spontaneity of non-actors, portability, and simpler, more economical options. Starting with the debut of the 9.5mm film format introduced by Pathé in 1922 and then reaffirmed by the 8mm *Kodak Ciné Eight* format launched by the Eastman Kodak Company in 1932, the initial approaches to insert film products for domestic use begun. From that point on a series of 8mm width film stocks and equipment were designed specifically to satisfy families that wished to preserve their memories at an accessible price. The costs were diminished for the customers by slicing 16mm films into two-8mm-stripes, which is why this format is also known as Double-8, while developing the film with the same instruments for 16mm. Jonathan F. Gunther, Director of Studies on Communication Policies at the Academy of Education Development in Washington, DC, who in 1976 wrote a detailed analysis of communication technology while focusing on smaller sizes film, pointed out that:

"Its origins (8-mm film) in "home movies" provide a sufficiently large market to warrant mass production of equipment, which means low unit costs. The amateur's desire to experiment has resulted in the development of a range of "do-it-yourself" gadgets which can often match the highly professionalized services of 16-mm film. [...] 8-mm is ubiquitous and is often present when noteworthy events occur. 8-mm can wait around where such events are likely to occur. 8-mm equipment is non-threatening to people, and encourages spontaneous, unaffected and intimate expression."

(*Super 8: the modest medium*, UNESCO, 1976 pp.15-20)

The freedom bestowed by the 8-mm carry-on cameras spawned an amateur market in industrialized countries, however, the format also entailed an array of headaches for the users who would produce poorly lighted images since often they possessed no cinematographic expertise, low-resolution frames due to a very small area on the film available for light-exposure, and would also encounter a troublesome way to thread the film into the camera.⁶

⁶ The film strip area that is available to expose to the light is directly related to the *resolution* it grants. The greater the area, the better the details. For it to be able to react to light it is coated with a photographic emulsion: "The photosensitive photographic and cinematographic material, both color and black and white, is usually constituted by silver salts: "the silver halide crystals". [...] The light *is met* in the camera gate with a kind of random and three-dimensional mosaic of silver halide crystals: the "emulsion".

Translation from *Conclusiones del Proyecto Técnica de Intermediario Digital (2k) Aplicada al Formato de Cine Super-8* by Daniel Henriquez-Ilic, 2009

And right then and there, in 1964 when the 8-mm sales headed downwards, the three major film stock companies worked on a prototype for a brand-new format that would respond to the ordeals brought by 8-mm cameras.

“Originally Kodak, Fuji and Agfa had set a common goal of developing an 8 mm format until the Tokyo Olympics. Rapid 8 would be the product called. But Kodak stepped out prematurely from the group and published the results so far as their own development under the name Super 8. Fuji tried to hold against it with its own further development of the project under the name Single 8. However, this format could never prevail.”

Translation from *Das Super 8-Format* article posted on Mediafix, 01.07.2015

Last accessed on Feb. 8, 2019: <https://mediafix.de/das-super-8-format/>

This new format carried along one-of-a-kind technical qualities that truly alleviated the task for the unskilled enjoyers. The cameras granted useful maneuverability by their size and carry-on handlers, while also adding practicality by placing the film stock inside a fast and easy to load cartridge (the only one *completely* sealed from light), and finally they awarded better quality by having both a light meter that provided automatic exposure and utilizing a bigger spatial area within the celluloid frame because of the rotation of the sprocket holes. Gunther noted:

“8 mm is economical and versatile. Lightweight, miniaturized equipment means greater portability and movement. [...] its essence is spontaneity and participation. [...] Simplicity of operation allows larger groups of people to gain access to production materials without lengthy, technical training. It began in the hands of the amateur. Its language is simplicity, its manner spontaneous, its usage as creative as its user.”

(*Super 8: the modest medium*, UNESCO, 1976 pp.83-85)



According to Gunther, the Super 8 frame area gained “about 50% over 8-mm by reducing and rotating the sprocket holes” (*Super 8: the modest medium*, pp23), here shown in Regular 8mm at the left and in Super 8mm at the right. These perforations transport and hold the film in place during the exposure process.

Agfa supported the Super 8 format by producing film stock for it, thus pushing aside the same-width Single-8 by Fuji. Even though both Fuji and Kodak were producing cameras for 8mm width film stock, the cartridges were incompatible (but could be projected on the same equipment once developed).⁷

⁷ There might critics to some Wikipedia articles regarding the diligence and conciseness put into them, however, the Super-8 Wiki is neatly put together, fairly industrious and withholds a resourceful index of small gauge formats and the history behind them: <https://es.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Super-8>



Above, the Canon 814XL-S Super 8 camera produced in Japan from 1978 to 1983. Below is the camera opened and it is possible to see where the cartridge is inserted. Photography taken at Kahl Film and TV e.K. Studio in Brühl, Germany, on February 15, 2019.



From its release in 1965 Super 8 became the preferred format for amateurs and film enthusiasts that also wished to have the possibility of enjoying their personal and family material in a unique projection experience. It is important to notice that the 8mm film sold at the time was always in reversal stock, meaning it requires no negative as 16mm and 35mm do, hence skipping a process from negative to the positive print for projection. The same film that is exposed in the camera is then processed at the lab and used to project. The small gauge film therefore evened-up communication technology by filling the gap between professional and non-professional film users. During the sixties and seventies, the Super 8 format thrived despite the lack of professional emulsions and the imminent rise of the magnetic tape.

“The popularity of S8 increased exponentially in the 1970s, with cameras, sound recorders, and editing equipment becoming increasingly complex and capable of professional-quality use for certain applications. In 1968, an estimated 21 million feet of S8 footage was processed in the U.S. alone.”

(David E. Williams, American Cinematographer, Nov. 1996)

Last accessed on 07.02.2019 https://www.chaffey.edu/broadcast/1992_colome_americancine.pdf

These printed family memories and gatherings around 8mm material were also strengthened by projecting motion-picture hits that were reduced from 35mm prints into 8mm film rolls, in a process completely opposite from the more frequent *blow-up* (scaling a smaller frame into a bigger one, for example, blowing-up an 8mm film into a 35mm film). This was used also as a marketing scheme to attract moviegoers by allowing them to see edited versions of films still being projected at movie theaters without critical parts on them (for example, the famous *I am your father* part from the Empire Strikes Back) but to, nevertheless, award the at-home movie projection experience.⁸ In a sense, the Super 8mm format handed over what smartphones provide today: the possibility of capturing one's life, reproducing it and savoring other artistic or entertaining material as well. It's hard to realize that Kodak had, for a long time, developed digital technology that would revolutionize their enterprise completely, but they somehow avoided to profit from the disruption of digital photography and cinematography by holding some of their own digital projects hostages mainly because of a traditional mindset which considered that memories laid in prints.

As it is possible to acknowledge on the TIME's *LightBox* video article about the considerable job losses in the Rochester area following the closing and subsequent bankruptcy of Kodak in 2012, the company didn't act on a long term strategy that would stably recognize the changes around image technology and its users.

“I built the first digital camera in a playback system and I demonstrated it to Kodak management in 1976. I walked into the conference room, I took photos and showed them right there. No film, no paper. They didn't ask me how, they asked me why. Why would you want to do that? Why would anybody want to look at their pictures in television sets? What is an electronic photo album gonna look like? They didn't think people would ever want it

⁸ Here can be found a synched Ken Films reduced Super 8 home movie version of the Empire Strikes Back:

Last accessed on Feb. 12, 2019: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7avLx1mfNO>

because prints were everything. That is how you capture memories, with prints and pictures and how they appreciated them, and it changed in an uncomfortable way for Kodak, who cared about permanence, reliability, and image quality. And all of a sudden imaging is not that at all, it's a casual conversation that you are sharing, it's a throwaway thing, it's a total re-definition of a fundamental thing that we used to do"

Steve Sasson Electrical Engineer at Kodak from 1973 to 2009, TIME *LightBox* article and video published on January 26, 2017. Last accessed on Feb. 13, 2019: <http://time.com/4649349/kodak-film-photography/>

On the same short video, an engineer's wife also remembers when back in early 2000 her husband started developing a compact device that allowed taking pictures, videos and playing music. It was the MC3, a gadget launched by Kodak in February 2001 and rapidly forgotten as a result of a poor and unstructured marketing game plan. The self-boycott perpetrated by Kodak and their MC3 product can be inferred by the almost non-existent graphic material available for this product today, versus the hundreds of pictures and carefully designed flyers printed and uploaded for their film stocks and cameras throughout their history. That same year, in October of 2001, Apple introduced its first portable media player: the iPod. As a personal digital device, the iPod changed completely the way people with no technical or mechanical knowledge would store and share their own content as well as reachable information.



A brief display of Kodak's Super 8 marketing flyers versus one of the only photographs available for their MC3 digital device (at the end). All pictures were taken for academic purposes only from the Getty Images photobank.

This might serve as an example of Kodak's denial about digitality within the imaging realm because of the threat it presented to their successful business paradigm. But it stills holds a truth regarding the experience of a picture and how it lingers through its users, clients or just people that relate to them over time depending on the medium. The technical improvements towards a hands-on film technology opened-up the gamut of stories being told and how those new tales were shot and therefore narrated. The same broadening process occurred with video mechanics and products that not only provided even more portability but also were able to record with synched sound and allowed immediate play-back at cheaper production costs (not only with affordable cameras but the possibility of re-using a tape).⁹

⁹ Nevertheless, in 1975, ten years after the commercial introduction of Super 8, Eastman Kodak launched a film strip that carried a lateral magnetic band for sound. It was possible to shoot real-life events with in-situ audible elements on Super 8 when used in a camera with a mic, granting automatically synched material.

Digital appliances in the image territory changed how people took pictures, how they preserved them and what they did with them afterward. When formats like the VHS, VHS-C, and Video 8 appeared in the late 1970s and early 1980s they delivered an immediacy impossible for film to convey. Skipping the film development process and the possibility of reviewing what has been just recorded, combined with the capability of tapes to be erased and reused over and over, handed out a different approach to still and moving pictures. It was not a frame for a one-of-a-kind moment anymore, the consciousness and the preparation stage behind a limited resource died out by the never-ending production that video bestowed. From then on sales went down the hill for Super 8 and during the 1990s it practically disappeared from the everyday user's radar. In 1997 Kodak announced the decision to stop the production of several Super 8 commodities, leaving the format's future on a hazy note.

"It is our intention to continue to offer Super 8 film products to the marketplace just as long as there is a "reasonable market demand" for these products. [...] We have discontinued our manufacture of current Ektachrome Super 8 film products. This decision was based on our inability to meet current governmental regulations for Health and Safety. Based on our present sales level of these products, coupled with a historical downward sales trend line and the expectations that this sales history will continue into the future, we cannot invest, in good faith, with our total stockholder population, in research and development to reformulate these emulsions without the expectation that we will be able to recoup that investment at some point in the future."

Super 8 Communique taken from Kodak Website, Feb. 1997

However, and even though its greater manufacturer was in a way stepping down, a handful of professionals and small companies maintained the format alive by supplying independent artists and enthusiasts with a constant flow of new film stock for Super 8: negative celluloid.

"[...] with the appearance of the low-cost digital video, the super-8 format was almost eclipsed. But its rebirth is related to the use of the format by professionals, for example, it can be mentioned that the company Super 8 Sound (now called Pro8mm) in California, USA, undertook an important research and development project in order to be able to offer its majors cinema clients in Hollywood the option of filming in super-8 for certain sequences of films, this with the same emulsions available in 35mm. This company, as well as the case of a company in Germany, have machines that allow making Super-8mm film from virgin 35mm stock. Thus, from 400 feet (or 1000 feet) to 35mm, it is possible to generate three lengths of 400 feet (or 1000 feet) of super-8 (perforated) format. The material is then packed in cartridges."

Translation from *Conclusiones del Proyecto Técnica de Intermediario Digital (2k) Aplicada al Formato de Cine Super-8* by Daniel Henríquez-Ilic, 2009

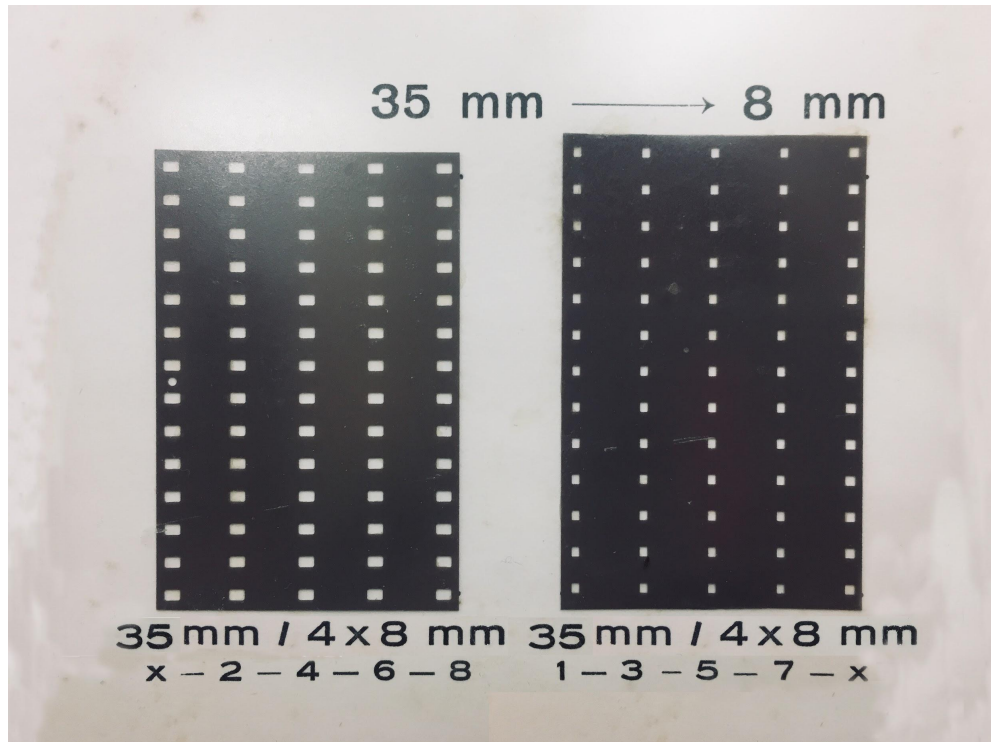


Super 8 cartridges by Kahl, the first company in Europe to cut 35mm film to pack it into Super 8mm cartridges. It can be noticed that the film is negative, not reversal, and offers emulsions available for 35mm film stock (with higher sensitivity to light). The first company in the United States to do so was Pro8mm, but they handle the perforations differently. Kahl works from an unperforated filmstrip and Pro8mm cuts the smaller filmstrips from a perforated 35mm film stock (that means they obtain 3 8mm-width filmstrips from any acetate based stock). Photography taken at Kahl studio in Brühl, Germany, on February 15, 2019.

This invigorating push from 35mm granted Super 8 a different look from its very origins in reversal film stock, which during the Super 8 usage climax granted 2 spots of exposure latitude.¹⁰ The characteristic low-latitude for reversal film gives it an unmistakable and distinct contrast amidst highlights and dark shadows. It also rewards the image with vibrant, energetic and particular colors. These exaggerated tonalities that navigate away from middle tones plus the low-detail depictions this medium endowed created a trademark look for Super 8. Such traits together present a dreamy expression so distinctive to this format that it may relate to why people go back to it even when the digital light capture today hands out considerable exposure latitude and much greater detail (unless compared to 65 mm where film would still show more detail). This may be due not only to a romanticism or nostalgia for old rituals related to our personal memories but to the very technical characteristics of Super 8 that bestow a completely different and unique visual atmosphere that even smartphone applications seek to emulate.¹¹ It might be so, that Super 8 is widely used as a narrative tool to “draft a period of time or scenes of flashbacks” (Henríquez, pp 17), but it also brings a time-tested mood, tone, and sense that speaks directly to a dramaturgy strategy.

¹⁰ Exposure latitude defines a range where a film stock obtains details on the highlights of the image as well as in the shadows. It determines how over and under-exposed parts of the image can be and still have acceptable results.

¹¹ There is a growing number of *Vintage Camera* applications that offer the true “retro look” from 8mm by adding digital dust and scratches, flickering, light leaks, and the so-called retro colors to digital pictures.



The film on the left side of the image shows the 8mm perforation (bigger and horizontal) and the one on the right side displays the Super 8 perforation (smaller and vertical). Both films are 35mm wide and show the perforations made to later cut the film into 4 film strips for smaller gauges cameras (emulsions manufactured by ORWO). Photography taken at Kahl studio in Brühl, Germany, on February 15, 2019.

The choice behind surreal colors, brilliant hues, and a unique high contrast could be taken by the director and cinematographer in the seek to degrade a look in pos of a desired feeling and cadence for the scenes, or even because of how it renders on the characters´ skins. It also may appeal to a less literal version of reality that invites the spectator to sink-in an unconscious or metaphysical setting. Back in 1997 when most of the amateurs had shifted to video and Super 8 was only enjoyed by aspirant filmmakers and few professional cinematographers, director and DP Shandor Black noted:

“In recent years, viewers have become less interested in clarity and more interested in suggestion - esoteric and ethereal looks. That’s reflected by the style’s acceptance by bigger clients, such as Reebok or Rollerblade, or in feature films like Natural Born Killers or Dead Man Walking. An what’s interesting is that Super 8 wasn’t necessarily used in these cases as a nostalgia device, but as a textural one.”

American Cinematographer, Nov. 1996 Last accessed on 07.02.2019:

https://www.chaffey.edu/broadcast/1992_colorne_americancine.pdf

The other rather obvious visual characteristics for Super 8 and the degraded images it bestows are the scratches and grain-rich textures. The original film stocks carry a lot of grain structure that also seems amplified due to the film strips´ size. This magnification of grain gives Super 8 a noticeable consistency, one even identifiable within other film gauges (not just in comparison to digital images), for instance when projected side by side with a 35mm film, Super 8 appears rougher and rawer. These imperfections give the format an exclusive pattern that entails a certain depth to the two-dimensional image, which becomes alive by

the movement of the clearly visible grains moving all over the frame combined with the singular film oscillation it bears.



Frame extracted from Daniel Henríquez "Halogenuros" short film where visible grain is found on the character's skin and hair, along with a high-contrast impression. Graphic images like this work best with Super 8, where tones are separated and no much detail is demanded. (2009)

In the continuous contrasting between film and video, movement has been brought up as a significant characteristic of video. So was the case for Lazzaratto's *Video, Flows and Real Time* where he points out that "*video technology not only shows us the movement, the never-ending variation of images, but also the "time-matter" from which the images are made (the electromagnetic waves)*" (The shot (or "habit") pp.1, 2008). He furthers his statement by citing Angela Melitopoulos words about movement in video: "*Movement is produced with the electronic structure of the image, its lines, grid, its granulation. Movement, frequencies, atoms and energy exist in the objects*". It may be perceived so, however, the *feeling* movement can bring to a piece and its whole atmosphere is even more evident in Super 8 because of its perforation. This format has one perforation per frame and only on one side of the film strip, which brings an instability that makes the film wiggle while being exposed.¹² This kind of "dance" the film stock endures is a Super 8 stamp that, accompanied by the projector's sound, is an utmost recognizable symbol. This might be the reason why this peculiar projecting sound is often placed when there are Super 8 scenes among other format sequences. This perforation has even been included in many commercial and music video productions in the past few years, therefore also playing an aesthetic role.

¹² To give an idea about the handling of perforations, 35 mm has 4 perforations per frame and on both sides thus giving it much more stability while being exposed.



Film frame from Drake's 2018 video *In my feelings* where at the left of the image is possible to see the perforation. This video can be found in youtube as well as part of this FADER article by Olivia Craighead beside other examples of perforation used as an artistic choice. Last accessed on Feb the 16th, 2019: <https://www.thefader.com/2018/09/14/music-video-super-8-drake-in-my-feelings-beyonce>

It is not surprising that many hip hop musicians have chosen Super 8 for their latest music videos since this type of music is by essence a street-art form and Super 8 brings a *vérité* look that fits perfectly with the rawness of rap. Super 8 has always an unhindered POV because there is always *someone behind the camera*, hence having an organic movement suited to the person holding it. The handler of Super 8 cameras was conceived to have an easy grip. In its conception, Super 8 was devised for a beholder, the witness and the camera are not still, they drift along as events unfold unlike a set of fabricated situations as fiction cinema often portraits when a tripod is used. As Rabih Mroué would point out in *The Pixelated Revolution* (lecture-performance, 2012), the use of stability grants images a certain institutionality and therefore a specific look. For him *"images captured with tripods and clear images convey a "historical victory" and inserts itself as an "official image"*, something that with Super 8 would be hard to reproduce both for its inner instability and its spontaneous anatomical approach. He also pointed out that *"a clear image becomes official"*, which is why as unobtrusive as Super 8 is, it helps capture and express an unofficial and unprocessed street look.

Super 8 rose as a format where mobility is a priority with not-set-up situations just as smartphones today serve as a spur-of-the-moment statement. It dismissed film paraphernalia and crew and allowed shooting even without planning, in a kind of go-with-the-flow attitude that radiated more a feeling than a task. As Gunther noted in 1976 *"Compare to these formats (16-mm or 35-mm film), Super 8 mm produces relatively low-definition, unglamorous images, which are suited more to documenting than to dressing up reality. In essence, Super 8 mm is a reality-based medium"* (Super 8: the modest medium, pp 20). It is therefore surprising that given its origin in family films, Super 8 survived its foretold death against newer technologies at the hand of professional filmmakers. But even though Super 8 was developed as a tool for the masses through the improvements

made to regular 8mm, it is nevertheless a hard format to shoot on when the goal is to obtain a quality image.

“The format became known as “amateur” partially because the cameras have always been deceptively easy to load and use, just as camcorders are now. But Super 8 was very difficult to master because you had to really understand cinematography and lighting to get good results with the stocks available.”

Phil Vigeant (Pro8mm founder for American Cinematographer, Nov. 1996)

The various aspects to have in mind before shooting in Super 8, such as smaller and darker viewfinders, the amount of light required to be properly exposed, and the difficulty to perform focus accurately, imply that technical know-how is necessary. As Super 8 expert Daniel Henríquez indicates:

“Generating a professional image in super-8 has the merit that to get a quality image the material has to be well photographed. It is a very good technical school of cinematography, because if you manage to do something good in miniature, then the other formats only bring more quality or resolution”.

(Nov. 23rd, 2018 via Whatsapp)



An out-of-focus frame from Sinead O’Brien’s music video “A list of normal sins”. It is a technical problem often present in Super 8 works, however, highly used as a dramatic tool. Watch the whole video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzNopkdbxwM>

The chemical and technical characteristics that convey Super 8’s particular high-hued colors and built-up contrast, frame fluctuation, blurriness, and low-detail depictions sum-up to conceive an aesthetic paradigm. It is not a format for a specific cultural moment but is a tool shaping a cinematic language. An aesthetic analysis is possible by deconstructing its contribution to a complex system of communication. Its’ handling and portability grants a personal point of view and “liveness” that translates directly into an honest spontaneous style that precedes our contemporary relationship with cameras. As Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin noted on *The Double Logic of Remediation*:

“No medium today, and certainly no single media event, seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media, any more than it works in isolation from other social and economic forces. What is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media”.

(Remediation. Understanding New Media, 2000 MIT Press)

Super 8 is the epitome of a medium revealing the medium. Its birth, as Gunther called it, as *a modest medium*, and its subsequent upheaval massive consumption, as well as its current revival in the face of ever-newer digital advances, speak of its enduring resilience as a narrative engine. The way it was used when first created and so many times seen afterward, creates a sense of something going beyond its technicality and time through a one-of-a-kind capability of expressing situations in a not manipulated or staged manner. Super 8 doesn't go after transparency, nor to conceal its own format properties, but to expose the whole experience of its carefully constructed intermediacy. And it has been so, that even today, when Super 8 is mostly used by independent or professional filmmakers, its language still appeals to the unprepared aesthetic it granted to families in the sixties and seventies, with a personal view as a director/witness that moves away from elaborated cinematographic constructions and towards a look born from the essentiality of a testimony.

Today Super 8 is going through a revival supported not only by the small family companies that helped it stay afloat during the nineties but also through the production and distribution of brand new products from Eastman Kodak Company itself. Their new Ektachrome 7294 film emulsion has been flying off the shelves since its first appearance in October 2018 and has been sold out twice in weeks when the first batches were available.¹³ This enormous commercial success is not the result of an elaborated marketing scheme by Kodak but the informal transference of information through many of the Super 8 blogs and facebook groups all over the internet. Super 8 enthusiasts are a stable community of thousands of collaborators that exchange technical support, memorabilia, and tutorials throughout an amplified web of connected users. Kodak has been also presenting their first Super 8 camera with integrated digital tools on some of the biggest imaging conventions in the world for a couple of years now, however, it has not been commercially introduced to this day. This new equipment shoots on cartridges but has a digital menu on a digital LCD screen to set the film's sensitivity, which is also used to see what is being shot (so the user no longer puts its eye on a small and often dark viewfinder). It is the first time they merge analog film capture with digital elements, for instance, a separate digital sound recording system incorporated (on SD cards) and an online service called Dark Room where people can both

¹³ The Ektachrome reversal film was discontinued by Kodak in 2012 due to low-sales-numbers and later brought back to life first for 35mm cameras and later for Super 8 equipment. Kodak's worldwide portfolio manager Diane Carroll-Yacoby disclosed, on a TIME interview, that “Color reversal film is quite complicated as its recipe is concerned” [...] “It is a complicated project for us to bring it back but because our customers are telling us that they want it, we're very excited to do this again. It's kind of a really special time for us.” TIME January 5, 2017. Last accessed on February 8, 2019:

<http://time.com/4624129/kodak-ektachrome/>



A video comparing the old Ektachrome 7285 and the new Ektachrome 100D-7294 has been uploaded on Vimeo by IB Cinema, Photoklassik Magazine & Eastman Kodak. This reversal film offers the old distinctive features but now with 3 stops exposure latitude. Last accessed January 12, 2019: <https://vimeo.com/296154486>

buy film stock but also secure services like processing and scanning at Kodak (they then upload the file into the Dark Room portal for instant download). The outside of the camera also integrates a grip similar to the DV cameras with a holding stick at the top (plus the familiar Super 8 grip at the bottom). The new stylized design may truly attract some of the old Super 8 devotees but also appeal to the thriving number of young enthusiasts being part of its resurgence. *Mi Mundo en Super 8*, a Spanish blog created by Ignacio Benedeti Corzo posted last month a series of statistics from the Facebook group *Super 8mm*. There he calls attention to the growing young community:

“Some people associate Super-8 with older people who yearn for the past. Nothing is further from reality! The age pyramid of the members shows that the largest group is the one between 25-34 years old. Then, the age group between 35 and 44 years, followed by filmmakers between 45 and 54 years.”

The largest and more active Super-8 group of Facebook: as we are?, *Mi Mundo en Super 8* blog, January 2019
Last accessed on Feb 4, 2019:

https://mimundoensuper-8.blogspot.com/2019/01/the-largest-and-more-active-super-8.html?fbclid=IwAR2nmMxwn1ekzUWqnK3AsGCCwI9G_8Gompd7ePk3r3WpsQe6Tf8XT8jYCnQ

He also points out that 19% of the members are female and the five most-active countries are the United States, United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, and Italy (with London, New York, Los Angeles, Buenos Aires, and Ciudad de México being the cities with more members). The survival of Super 8 is also guaranteed by the several existent labs developing Super 8 regularly and with professional expertise like Retro Lab in Spain, Super8 Reversal Lab in the Netherlands, Andec in Germany and Retro 8 in Japan, among others, and also those who develop it with industry standards in Los Angeles, for example, Pro8mm and Spectra Film and Video, and Cinelab in London. The latter being the host of the *Straight8* annual competition where short films shot in a single Super 8 cartridge participate for the possibility of being showcased at Cannes and other film festivals. They develop all the films to make

sure they have no editing and the participants only see the final results when selected, reminding the players of one of Super 8's early and defining qualities, it is edited on camera.

Between Danny Plotnick's upcoming book *Super 8: An Illustrated History* (Rare Bird Books, October 15, 2019) and Super 8's fervent and artistic followers, the format also ensures an academic perspective and a creative momentum that might as well last another 50 years. The available emulsions favor a wide range of productions, both in reversal and negative film stock, and many of the places mentioned above also scan Super 8 for an easy editing process and a huge manipulation spectrum.¹⁴ These services are becoming exponentially more accessible and it is the embodiment of digitalization: you hold the film in a cartridge in your hand and later on you could access a 4K version to handle it on your preferred digital suite. As properly presaged by Phil Vigeant on 1996, the future of the format seems promising:

"There are probably 60 million S8 cameras out there in the world, a fact which, when combined with modern film stocks, creates an incredible image-making potential - a new option that will help encourage and develop the next generation of cinematographers and filmmakers."

Phil Vigeant, article published on American Cinematographer in Nov. 1996

Last accessed on 07.02.2019: https://www.chaffey.edu/broadcast/1992_colorne_americancine.pdf

When asked about Super 8 more than 20 years later and to reflect on why it has achieved such a successful comeback, Vigeant also indicates its physicality as a key ingredient today:

"There is a growing interest globally in physical experiences, so people in many fields are re-examining how things were done before everything became so digital and are experimenting with these technologies. In motion pictures films, Super 8 is just the easiest and least expensive way to have the experience."

Phil Vigeant (via internet messenger on January 17, 2019)

Even though digital imagery reigns, the hipper definition of digital images cannot resemble the intrinsic message transmitted with Super 8 and the transcendence it can uphold. As the untrained turned to it in its very beginning, the unskilled prefer now digital and by doing so we are daily bombed with artificial pictures in a qualitative change that repeats itself over and over for the sake of faster, cheaper and massive technology. But would it be wise to, every once in a while, question if the fresh technological advances brought by the inevitable passage of time are always the most effective way to preserve a moment for posterity (or if that matters at all)? There is no doubt that digitality supports local and ubiquitous users/interlocutors delivering information from non-institutional sources, thus democratizing communication technology even further, however, the data storage system in the digital realm has not been solved. The constant creation and reformulation of operating systems, software, and electronic devices leaves a series of digital captives, recollections trapped on disks and memory cards that sooner or later are unable to run on current apparatuses. Even though keeping a film roll might take up space and needs certain environmental control, its materiality lasts for years, even a 100 years, if kept in the right conditions (and depending on the plot, prints on paper could last up to 600 years according to Kodak Alaris). It should not be forgotten that Super 8's successors, like VHS or Video 8, relied completely on the magnetic tape and are today a concern for archives because of its deterioration over time.

The amount of information damaged, lost or endangered from this format transition is incalculable and is happening once again since the current information is only being preserved as code (and many times even encrypted). The historical value a moment holds and the thought process behind its preservation should be given a conscious consideration in spite of the inevitable turn of the wheel of time and its imminent new inventions.

¹⁴ Kodak catalog available today: Vision3 50D / 7203 (Negative Color) since about 7 years
Vision3 200T / 7213 (Negative Color) available since about 10 years ago
Vision3 500T / 7219 (Negative Color) available since about 10 years ago
Tri-X 200D / 7266 (Reversal B/W) available since about 14 years ago, and previously during the seventies (código 7278), and the brand new Ektachrome 100D / 7294 (Reversal Color) available since about 4 months ago.
Foma in the Czech Republic also manufactures Black and White film for Super 8.