

***Et in Arcadia Ego:*
New Zealand's Rural Landscape in Visual Culture and Early Amateur
Film**

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Abstract

Often overlooked within histories of cinema, amateur films or home movies, which record personal, local and everyday experience, both relate to and deviate from other contemporary forms of visual culture. In New Zealand, for example, idealised images of pastoral landscapes that ignore the social realities of rural life have a long history across a wide range of media. Home movies reveal a somewhat different view of rural history. Less concerned with scenery than with the scene of daily life, amateur films document specific concrete experiences in a particular time and place, yet upon closer examination appear to share, if not the iconography or aesthetics of professional media, at least some of the wider aspirations of cultural discourses in circulation.

Introduction

Jonathan Dennis (1993) described New Zealand's early cinema as 'local, personal and irregular' (6), a characterisation that likens filmmaking of the silent era to that of home movies. Given the supposedly 'amateurish' nature of many professional efforts, it would perhaps be all too easy to dismiss the study of actual home movies of the period as simply fated to reveal an even humbler standard of production, lacking technical merit or ideological significance. It is the purpose of the present article, however, to contend quite the contrary: that early home movies may in fact offer an insightful – and sometimes even accomplished – window upon the national landscape, one that both intersects with the ideological aspirations of professional media production and maintains a distinctively grounded approach to the more mundane realities of life during the interwar years.

There has been considerable interest in amateur film and home movies internationally in recent years. Relatively little has been written to date about amateur filmmaking practices in New Zealand, however. In a country with a history of limited and sporadic

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professional film production prior to the late 1970s, this is perhaps somewhat surprising, or at least noticeably incongruous with the actual pattern of filmmaking during the middle years of the twentieth century. Following the release of 16mm camera equipment and safety acetate film stock on the consumer domestic market in 1923, home movie-making became a popular pastime in New Zealand. Certainly, the extensive collection in the national film archive at Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision testifies to the enthusiasm of amateurs for turning their cameras on their own lives and surroundings. What did the amateur movie camera record? How do these representations differ from other kinds of images? And perhaps more importantly, why should we take any special interest in amateur films? In order to address these questions, we might productively draw a comparison between amateur films and other types of visual culture. For this purpose, the rural landscape will act as a case study. This iconic subject can be seen in all manner of images: tourist films, posters and other advertising material, photography and painting. After tracing a brief history of professional representation, I will consider two specific examples of the rural landscape seen in films made by amateurs during the 1930s. This comparative approach will help to illustrate some of the distinctive features of amateur films, as well as traits they may share with the more polished products of professional image-makers.

Picturesque imagery depicting rural New Zealand as an idyllic pastoral paradise has a long history. Since the late nineteenth century, visions of seemingly unadulterated scenic landscapes have appeared in different types of visual media, persisting in tourist marketing material even to this day (notwithstanding mounting concerns about the contamination of our waterways and other ecological issues that attest to a distinct lack of purity in our rural environment). Idealised views of the New Zealand countryside have consistently disregarded the social realities of rural existence, appearing to presuppose the unfamiliar gaze of an (urban) outsider. Rural residents recorded their own impressions of their surroundings on film, in many ways distinct from that of professional visual culture. This insider's view of rural life is typically specific and concrete: home movies record daily experiences in a particular time and place, rather than timeless 'universal space'. Yet the prevalent image of the countryside seen in popular media is not entirely dissimilar in some respects from those produced by amateurs. Before examining this in further detail, however, we might consider a rather more general question: what kinds of historical evidence do home movies actually provide?

Nostalgic View of a Bygone Era?

Home movies tend to be repetitive, rather than innovative, both in style and content. The same subjects filmed in similar ways appear with great regularity in home movies made in different times and places, and by different groups of people. They do not usually have a conventional narrative structure and can seem boring, especially to viewers who have no personal connection to a particular film or its maker. They are often amateurish in technique, that is, 'badly shot' by professional standards, displaying

unsteady camerawork, erratic pans, poor exposures or images that are out of focus. Home movies typically contain socially acceptable subjects such as holidays, babies, children or pets playing on the back lawn, family outings and gatherings that feature happy, smiling people (supposedly) having a good time together. Other subjects are taboo: anything too personal or threatening to the image of the ideal family is excluded. (There are no onscreen arguments, weddings are recorded not divorces, and so on) (Odin 2008, 262). Due to this restricted range of subject material, home movies are readily interpreted as a rose-tinted vision of middle-class life in which nothing unpleasant ever enters the frame and, as such, may be perceived as sentimental. Increasingly, in our post-celluloid age, they may also be viewed as a nostalgic index of the past that can be mobilised to illustrate visual narratives evoking a romanticised version of twentieth-century history.¹ Given the rather circumscribed view of the world home movies supposedly offer, why should anyone take a serious or scholarly interest in them?

Before attempting to answer this question, it should be noted that non-professionals actually produced a wide range of other kinds of films aside from home movies, which were viewed in various contexts such as ciné-clubs, parish or community halls, galleries and amateur film festivals. However, in order to debunk the popular image of the home movie, this discussion focuses on films which, even if they were recorded outside a strictly domestic context, were probably watched in one. There are a number of reasons why the analysis of such films may be of interest to those concerned with cinematic or visual histories. Firstly, home movies (or amateur films more generally) include subjects not recorded elsewhere. This is especially true in countries with historically small-scale professional film production such as New Zealand. Home movies are often the only cinematic records of many aspects of life, particularly private events and everyday experiences. In its catalogued collection prior to 1970, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision, for example, has approximately 10,000 amateur films compared with around 7,000 professional ones. Leaving aside the vexing question of discrepancies in archival acquisition of different types of film (which, due to accession policy and availability, is always a fraction of the total number produced), Ngā Taonga's collection might nevertheless plausibly be construed as a cursory indicator that amateur production was the numerically dominant mode of filmmaking in this country for much of the twentieth century.

Secondly, home movies provide an indication of what people valued. Amateur filmmaking was extremely expensive, particularly in the decades immediately following its inception. With rolls of film only a few minutes in length, people recorded what was important or interesting to them (at least at the time of filming). Due to the cost, it should of course be recognised that amateur films usually represent a white, economically-privileged view of life. Films include not only how people saw themselves or how they wished to be seen, but also how members of one group viewed others who were not part of their immediate social circle (Norris Nicholson 1997, 204-6),

something that is particularly evident in amateur tourist films, such as those of Rotorua, a popular travel destination for both local and international visitors.²

Thirdly, amateur films provide localised versions of national histories. They record the specific experiences of individuals or groups in a particular time and place, rather than what Catherine Fowler (2006) calls the 'universal space' seen in professional filmmaking (135). In New Zealand, government travelogues of the interwar period are a good example of the latter. Typically, they depict empty attractive scenery, which, due to its generalised picturesque qualities, is accessible to the unfamiliar gaze of outsiders, the cinematic idealisation (or homogenisation) of the national landscape supposedly acting as an invitation to potential tourists or settlers to either visit or immigrate to our shores (Shand 2009, 165). Due to the light sensitivity of film stock, early home movies were also usually recorded outdoors. The landscape is therefore a visible element in many film; however, the view is a much more personal one, often taking in the private experience of public space (Capitanio 2012, 47) on a local level. Family outings to fairs, street parades and other local events, for example, often feature in amateur films. By focusing on the local, private or personal, home movies document historical experiences that professional production may overlook. However, this also creates a quandary for the researcher in the archive, the location where home movies increasingly reside: how do you understand someone else's home movie?

One of the most immediate and perplexing issues that any researcher of amateur film is confronted with when looking at home movies in an archival setting is that personal meanings filmmakers and participants attached to the images are usually lost. The films are silent and fragmented. They usually exhibit no coherent structure and the majority of films have no inter-titles. Additionally, there may be little or no documentation about the films available. Faced with the rather daunting task of navigating hundreds of hours of fairly repetitive footage that may not seem particularly meaningful to anyone not connected with making it, even the most dedicated researcher might understandably recoil in dismay. Amateur film's propensity for archival disorder occasions less a fever perhaps than a persistent headache.

Home movies are simultaneously individualised and socially ritualised images. Negotiating amateur aesthetics involves making sense of something both idiosyncratic and stereotypical. Looking at the same kinds of subjects filmed in reasonably similar yet subtly unique ways might seem like a recipe for boredom. However, it is possible to find meaning in other people's private movies. Although their past life or original meanings may be lost, films can be understood as historical documents. Their meaning is fluid rather than fixed, however, involving an act of interpretation that is necessarily subjective but (at least potentially) historically grounded. Film historian Heather Norris Nicholson (1997) describes amateur films as utilising a 'borrowed visual vocabulary' (208). That is to say, home movies reference other forms of visual culture in circulation, such as photography, postcards, advertising posters, paintings and professional cinema. Given this, films may be read in terms of what they convey about how amateurs

participated in wider social or cultural discourses through media production (Schneider 2003, 168-9, 175). This creates a way of understanding personal films.

Rural New Zealand: A Pastoral Paradise?

Returning to the aforementioned notion of *universal space* vis-à-vis the depiction of rural New Zealand in visual culture, it is noteworthy that, according to Fowler and Helfield (2006), the most common cinematic mode of representing the countryside, as well as theorising rural cinema, follows a convention that the position of both filmmaker and spectator is urban (2). The rural is therefore contrasted as an exotic other with idyllic, picturesque imagery typically constructing a rustic paradise unburdened by specific geographic or historical conditions. This type of generic stylisation is visible in New Zealand government scenics of the 1920s and 1930s, which feature predominantly empty landscapes available for all to enjoy, or at least anyone who could afford a movie ticket or the cost of travel.³ This mode of representation was not confined to cinema, extending across a broad range of visual culture. New Zealand railway posters from the interwar years offer another good illustration of this universalising approach to rural landscapes. Specific localities that a tourist might visit take on a generic or even Europeanised appearance in advertising posters, whereby Lake Wanaka, for example, might be represented as akin to the French Riviera.⁴ The at once familiar and exotic, usually uninhabited scenery of tourist images creates an accessibly non-specific universal space into which the viewer-cum-tourist might escape in imagination (and perhaps subsequently on holiday). Conversely, Fowler has argued that such idealised panoramic views of rural space may 'be said not to take us *toward* but rather to take us *away* from the land', severing any connection with 'real' soil in favour of layers of cultural imaginings (9-10, original emphasis).

Looking at landscape painting, Francis Pound (2009) has similarly suggested that idealised pastoral scenes represent the rural for urban consumption (200). Landscape painting portraying New Zealand's rural scenery in the early twentieth century, according to Pound, routinely 'makes absent precisely those for whom it is a lived experience' (199). Whilst artists such as Rita Angus or Toss Wollaston often included indications of human habitation in their paintings, actual rural residents were just as frequently omitted from the landscape. In the absence of a rural workforce, the countryside appears spontaneously abundant, productive of its own accord with crops that require no human hand to be sowed or harvested and haystacks that neatly pile themselves. In fact, the members of rural communities were so seldom painted one observer noted in 1937 that looking at any local art exhibition the onlooker 'would probably wonder if anyone in New Zealand was doing any work' (ibid.).

Such depopulated rural landscapes are echoed in the images of professional photography and advertising material. The government's National Publicity Studios and publications such as Auckland's *Weekly News* disseminated a profusion of picturesque photographs of the New Zealand countryside that ignored the social realities of labour

in favour of images suggesting ‘that the sun shone continuously in Aotearoa’ (Main and Turner 1993, 45). High-country mustering on horseback, often depicting riders pausing to survey panoramic landscapes, was an especially popular image, reiterated in advertising posters and other print material, linking contemporary life with a pioneering past. The general impression of images such as those that adorned the covers of popular publications like *The Otago Daily Times* Christmas annual is that flocks of sheep conveniently walk in the right direction without much encouragement or effort on the part of the musterer (Alsop et al., 2012). Similarly, when cultivation was represented as an act of human labour (rather than merely alluded to via the depiction of neatly furrowed land), the soil was more often tilled by a team of draft horses than a tractor, despite the extensive mechanisation of the New Zealand countryside that had already begun to take place by the interwar period. Likewise, in a rare instance when Angus chose to include several rural workers in a watercolour scene of haymaking in the early 1940s, they appear to have curiously turned into a local peasantry armed with nothing but pitchforks.

In this highly pervasive representation of rural New Zealand as an Arcadian paradise, very little work seems to or even needs to be done, and if absolutely necessary, it could readily be accomplished with a horse, a hand plough or perhaps a pitchfork. New Zealand's romantic pioneering heritage thrived within images of the countryside that afforded a reassuringly sentimental view of rural life. The frequent omission of a rural population from the landscape, including the invisibility of rural workers (or in other instances, their romanticisation), in film, painting and other types of imagery may be read in terms of a discursive (rather than an actual physical) terrain. Depopulated picturesque views appear to tacitly assume the desire of an urban spectator to enter an enticing (albeit imaginary) rural paradise, one that is both conveniently vacant (or vacated) and essentially nostalgic in character. Modern New Zealand, if it existed at all, was located far away in some distant urban centre, which might be found at the end of a railway track or very long highway in paintings such as those of Rita Angus or Rata Lovell-Smith. Alternatively, modernity might be formally integrated (and thereby subsumed) within the landscape; Doris Lusk's hydroelectric stations, for example, seem to feature more as a compositional element than a mechanical presence in her paintings, the subtle inclusion of technology ‘her way of being modern, without being *too* modern’ (Pound 2009, 193, original emphasis).

Modernity is also a feature of industrial films made by the government during the interwar years. Far fewer in number than scenics, these films sometimes include aspects of the modern farming methods used in New Zealand, such as automated harvesting. However, many of these films are more concerned with secondary industries that occurred in urban centres. The largely mechanised manufacture of woollen goods is documented in considerable detail in *Rug Making* (1929) and *Golden Fleece* (1935), for example. Where the raw product was actually grown is glimpsed only briefly in scenic shots of picturesque farmland, however.

Noticeably, what had largely disappeared from the rural image by the interwar period was any allusion to the destruction of native habitat that was necessary in order to create pasturelands, or to the displacement of local iwi by European settlers. Interestingly, there is a striking contrast between such paradisaic imagery and paintings of the previous century recording the business of clearing forest for farmland, including the burning or felling of trees and sawing of timber, or simply the stumps left behind to rot upon the recently scarred land. Māori figures sometimes hover on the edge of frame, witnesses to the advancing tide of civilising decimation and their own dispossession of ancestral lands (Pound, 2009, 201-2). In an 1856 watercolour by English landscape artist William Strutt showing a bush burn gone awry, there is even some recognition of the more horrifyingly destructive (as well as perilous) side of European settlement. By the interwar years, however, a strong degree of romanticism had become entrenched in idyllic scenes where the natural features of the landscape appear to co-exist harmoniously with its pastoral usage. While tree ferns, for example, might be used to add a degree of local specificity, the universalising approach to illustrating the New Zealand countryside largely favoured the retention of only those elements deemed favourable to the present, that is, symbols of 'natural' abundance within a distinctly Europeanised landscape. In this Arcadia of the South Pacific, nature and cultivation exist in timeless concord with 'seldom anything to suggest one might encroach on the other', or even that the landscape has been modified by human endeavour at all (*ibid.*, 199). It might of course be argued that by the early twentieth century the land had been more-or-less successfully conquered so that picturesque images of a rural paradise therefore represent an artist's view of the actual countryside, albeit in a slightly idealised form. But was this actually the case?

Within its collection of home movies or 'personal records' (the categorisation adopted for cataloguing purposes), Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision has several films depicting a series of ploughing competitions and demonstrations during the 1930s recorded in the central North Island by amateur filmmaker Bill Cameron. One particular film dating from 1938 opens with a wide panning shot surveying the landscape, establishing a scene of fairly swampy pastureland dotted with reeds and flax bushes and the occasional woolly inhabitant. The filmmaker then moves in closer to introduce the film's protagonist: a swamp plough attached to a caterpillar tractor, replete with 'supporting cast' of horse and rider, all posed together conveniently for the shot. Having identified the film's participants, the camera proceeds to follow the actions of its principal actors attentively. Initially, the tractor and plough are seen to make light work of reeds and grasses, in spite of the extremely wet boggy soil that has to be negotiated. Flax bushes likewise present no particular problem for the accommodating blades of the plough. At the end of a furrow, the driver demonstrates by twisting in his seat to turn a control wheel on the plough that it is quite feasible to operate the machinery without additional assistance. This almost seems unnecessary, however, as a party of apparently very interested observers in a subsequent shot follow the path of the tractor closely on foot. Lastly and most impressively, the tractor cuts a swathe of destruction through standing

mānuka scrub simply by driving over the trees with the plough blade. Although the camera remains relatively static, it is positioned, at least initially, close to the action with its operator presumably standing as near as possible to the furrow of the passing tractor that moves toward the horizon line in most shots, viewed from the rear. The film closes with a series of shots of the furrowed earth and reestablishing pans of the surrounding farmland, perhaps suggesting further terrain for the tractor and its indefatigable blade to potentially transfigure.

In this vision of the combined power of technology and human involvement to transform the landscape, it seems possible to turn almost anything into compost with the simple acquisition of newfangled machinery. Cameron recorded about half an hour of footage of various ploughing demonstrations and competitions on different occasions. What this repeated and exceptionally focused attention to one subject appears to suggest is that great importance was attached to the modernisation of farming practices and the ability of machinery to remodel the landscape by turning natural habitat into potential pasture or arable land. Likewise, the presence of a crowd of onlookers assembled to witness this scene of destruction, or progress – as befits one's interpretation – seems to underline the fervent interest of rural people in their own progression towards modernity, a process of becoming more often associated with urbanisation.

Cameron's fascination with machinery's capacity to magnify human power and efficiency whilst reducing physical labour is not in any way exceptional. If anything, Ngā Taonga's collection, which features a significant number of amateur farming films from the period, reveals that the caterpillar tractor and swamp plough might almost be considered emblematic of New Zealand's interwar countryside. Scenes like that of Cameron's film actually appear with remarkable regularity in amateur films, which seems to signal a landscape not yet completely won by human endeavour. Interestingly, bulldozers and other earthmoving equipment used for land clearance and road works also feature reasonably often in early amateur films, which again seems to imply a considerable amount of interest in progress and modernity. Likewise, hydroelectric dam construction work, scenes of airfields and even aerial footage were not uncommon subjects to film.

Not explicitly concerned with rural transformation but demonstrating a comparable attentiveness to the processes of labour, Mrs. J. Spence's cinematic record offering 'A Glimpse of Life on Papatatu Station' (1935) nonetheless challenges the Christmas annual image of high country mustering. Like Cameron, Spence demonstrates a basic knowledge of cinematic storytelling in a film that is well-organised with establishing wide shots, close ups of significant details and even a rudimentary narrative structure. Unlike Cameron's film, however, which, like most amateur footage, appears to be edited in-camera only,⁵ Spence's film was clearly subject to some degree of subsequent editing, as inter-titles – a relatively uncommon feature in home movies – have been added to provide basic story information. Within the space of a few minutes the filmmaker

concisely documents an episode of sheep mustering on the steep hills of a high country station. Opening with an inter-title (adorned with the added artistic flourish of a line drawing of a rooster) announcing 'Breakfast before Dawn', the film depicts a group of musterers saddling their mounts, riding into the hills and building a temporary enclosure into which a flock of ewes and lambs are then driven. Following a tea break, the dry ewes are marked and separated from the wet, with those requiring a 'manicure' receiving the requisite attention. The lambs' tails are docked and counted before the flock is returned to the paddock. The fencing is then disassembled and loaded onto packhorses. Finally, the musterers depart for home, leaving 'the ewes and lambs grazing quietly' on the hills. The film ends neatly where it began: outside the stable with a rider now unsaddling his horse. At each stage of the proceedings the filmmaker cuts between wide shots situating the action and mid-shots or close-ups providing more detail of various activities such as erecting the fencing or trimming sheep's hooves. The precision of these cuts, like the use of inter-titles, suggests the post-filming arrangement of shots into a subsequently refined narrative. While the final film quite likely approximates the actual order of undertakings (with perhaps a subtle reorganisation of wide shots and close ups), it is equally concerned with constructing a coherent story from the day's events.

While Spence's film includes a few brief, arguably romantic images of high-country mustering, such as a shot of a musterer surveying the landscape or a line of horses and riders ascending a hillside seen in silhouette, the film's emphasis remains firmly upon the specificities of working life, including the physical effort involved in farming activities. Instead of watching leisurely from horseback (à la Christmas annual), relying solely on their dogs (or even ovine goodwill) to manoeuvre the flock; for example, in some shots men are seen leading their horses on foot, waving their arms vigorously to drive sheep in the desired direction. In this and another film dating from 1935, 'Station Life throughout the Year on Paparatu', which records dipping lambs in January (perhaps intended as one of a series featuring seasonal tasks), working with sheep in yards is visibly a labour-intensive (or even laborious) occupation, with reluctant animals, for example, requiring to be pushed along a race and into the dip. Further at odds with the idealised image of a rural paradise, Spence includes a close-up of the container of poison used to prepare the dip, as well as focusing on the pile of severed lambs' tails that a man carefully counts on hands and knees. Equally unlike most professional images of farming, the importance of a rural community is also much in evidence in these films. Both mustering and dipping are undertaken collectively, with even children participating in the latter activity, as well as a woman (perhaps the filmmaker) appearing briefly on camera. Like Cameron's, Spence's film is concerned with how the land is used, but its focus extends beyond what work is done to *who* is actually doing it. While a community is clearly present on the edges of Cameron's frame, workers occupy a more central position in the Paparatu films; even smoko beside the yards is documented in careful detail, a moment of repose providing the opportunity for the camera to capture the faces of the individual musterers in close up. The filmmaker's use

of 'we' in the inter-titles further underlines the sense of collectivity, perhaps extending to include the film's viewers who were quite likely those witnessed onscreen, the participants and audiences of home movies often being one and the same.

Conclusion

Professionally made images of rural New Zealand typically present an unpopulated, Europeanised, cultivated, abundant and changeless countryside, that is, a timeless universal space, which is largely ahistorical. In the amateur farming films discussed above, idealisation is for the most part eschewed. The amateur rural landscape is peopled, visibly worked and still in the process of being tamed or 'broken in', a specific place subject to historical conditions and change. In this sense, home movies appear to resonate with the country's pioneering heritage, something which had by the interwar years, according to Jock Phillips (1987), acquired an almost mythical status within New Zealand culture (39). Albeit less widely represented in visual form, the legacy of the nineteenth century's frontier society continued to exert a considerable influence on the popular imagination, bestowing respectability upon manual labour well into the twentieth century. Home movies display a distinct regard for physical outdoor work; however, it is seen within a concrete, not a mythologised vision of rural society.

Given the apparent desire of amateurs such as Cameron and Spence to record the seasonal rhythms of rural work or alterations of the landscape, it might be asked if this indicates the filmmakers' recognition of local experience within a broader historical pattern. Obviously, changes such as the replacement of draft horses with tractors provided a highly visible index of rural transformation in this period. Describing amateur filmmakers as the historical chroniclers of their age, however, is perhaps to overstate the case. Assuming these types of records were created for the purposes of posterity may retrospectively assign filmmakers a level of intentionality they quite possibly lacked.⁶ It seems doubtful that amateurs of the 1930s could have foreseen the possibility that their personal records would become historical documents in a public archive, or even be considered of public interest at a much later date.

Regardless of the original intention of these works, Cameron's and Spence's films attentively document a slice of rural life in a particular time and place through the careful selection of subject and framing of shots. Admittedly, such attempts to record local experience would appear to fall short of Griersonian documentary proper, yet the accumulation of 'little daily doings' is nonetheless not without dramatic structure or narrative.⁷ Moreover, what is perhaps most distinctive about amateur films as a view of the countryside is that they were made *by* and (presumably most often) *for* rural people. The films discussed seem to presuppose familiarity with the rural milieu: Cameron's film offers no expository details beyond those available onscreen and although Spence added informative inter-titles conceivably useful to an urban audience otherwise unfamiliar with farming practices, the exact ratio of toxin to water used in the preparation of sheep dip, for example, would appear a largely superfluous detail to any

but the rural viewer. In this way, amateur films offer a striking contrast with professional images of the rural landscape framed by outsiders and seemingly intended for an urban audience.

There is one notable similarity, however, between amateur and professional views of the countryside: both types of images typically depict a landscape of use. While professional images frequently display an idealised countryside of spontaneous fecundity disparate with amateur filmmakers' focus upon the work required to cultivate the land, in both instances rural New Zealand is nonetheless a landscape transformed by Pākehā modernity. As Pound (2009) and others have noted, this landscape of use was reassuring to Pākehā New Zealand: it justified the possession or ownership of land. Māori Aotearoa disappeared altogether from views that recorded the permanence of European cultivation, receding into a past unrepresented and easily forgotten (201). That amateur filmmakers chose to document their community's mark upon the landscape is perhaps significant. Yet home movies not only reflect but also refine and contradict public narratives, personalising and particularising wider cultural understandings and discursive practices. To this extent, it may be concluded that the comparison of professional and amateur images suggests ways in which individuals and groups both reproduce and disregard aspects of prevailing social ideologies or discourses in circulation. Professionals and amateurs alike created works in a zeitgeist of shared but perhaps often ambivalent aspirations.

While amateurs have utilised many other methods to document their personal experiences in visual form, such as snapshot photography or watercolour, only film (and subsequently video) offers the possibility of capturing duration. In this sense, film is the ideal medium to record (and study) the working landscape. In the examples discussed, the filmmakers' concern with the process of work takes full advantage of one of the intrinsic attributes of cinema: the ability to record movement in time. In the archive, such films attest to Bazin's characterisation of cinema as 'change mummified': preserved monuments to the labours of early twentieth-century New Zealanders caught in their duration in time, yet equally, as historical documents, arrested from that time. The amateur camera is contemporary eyewitness to the reconfiguration of the rural landscape in the wake of the modern machine – *et in Arcadia ego* – yet unlike Poussin's shepherds, the inhabitants of home movies do not pause in melancholic reflection upon the presence of death and decay in their pastoral paradise. Rather, its earthly erosion occasions a delighted awe at the transformative capacity of twentieth-century modernity.

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Notes

¹ The New Zealand Film Archive's PET exhibition (2014), which included home movie footage paired with audio recordings of participants' recollections of family pets, offered a good example of this tactic. Likewise, the recent compilation film *From Scotland with Love* (2014), composed of various types of pre-digital ephemeral found footage (including amateur film) accompanied by a neo-folk soundtrack, seems intended to provoke a kind of nationalistic nostalgia for life in the mid-twentieth century. Patricia Erens (1986) has discussed the use of home movie style imagery to invoke similar sentiments in commercial narrative filmmaking (100).

² See Hickman (2015, chapter 2) for discussion of amateur tourist films in New Zealand; Heather Norris Nicholson and Alexandra Schneider have written extensively about holiday films in a European context.

³ Human absence in these films was in accordance with a directive from the Government Publicity Office intended to prevent the films becoming dated due to changes in fashion (Dennis 1993, 9) (i.e. to make them appear *timeless* and, presumably, of universal appeal). Changes in the appearance of motor vehicles or other technologies (or even filmmaking techniques) were apparently not subject to the same consideration, however.

⁴ Specific examples of this kind of imagery can be seen in Alsop et al. (2012).

⁵ Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision provides viewing copies on VHS, DVD or digital file. Post-filming (rather than in-camera) editing can therefore only readily be determined via indicators such as the inclusion of inter-titles, the absence of obviously unintended mishaps etc. (i.e. features that distinguish an amateur film as a more consciously-crafted or subsequently arranged product than the majority of home movies, which tend to rely on spontaneous organisation).

⁶ Interestingly, Michelle Baddiley (2009) makes exactly this kind of assumption, declaring Australian amateur filmmakers 'had one eye on the past and one eye fixed firmly on the future' when recording scenes depicting street life or traffic, rather than simply family members (135). The conjecture that such scenes were 'filmed for posterity' (even if only intended for an audience of descendants rather than a general public) appears to disregard the possibility that amateur filmmakers may have been fascinated as much by the aesthetic qualities – including the spectacle of bustling movement – of contemporary life as by the potential to record history in the making.

⁷ Although not necessarily dismissive of the value of amateur film in itself, Grierson drew a clear distinction between documentary-making as a specific creative practice and '[t]he little daily doings, [which] however finely symphonised, are not enough. One must pile up beyond doing or process to creation itself, before one hits the higher reaches of art', i.e. documentary cinema (in Amad 2010, 90). According to this view, most home movies, including those featuring some degree of narrative or subsequent arrangement, are essentially raw material or documents, rather than *documentaries* per se. Whether or not such efforts should be regarded creative or artistic is of course purely subjective, but it seems likely that many amateurs did consider their filmmaking activities in some respect creative.

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