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# Amateur Cinema:
# History, Theory, and Genre
# (1930-80)

by

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# Abstract

This thesis, *Amateur Cinema: History, Theory, and Genre* (1930-1980), draws largely on primary material from the Scottish Screen Archive and related museum sources. The project establishes a critical dialogue between university-based Film Studies and the archive sector, via a series of case studies of influential groups, individuals, and movements. Prefaced by a chapter entitled 'Theorising Amateur Film: Limitations and Possibilities' detailing the domination of amateur cinema studies by discussion of the 'home mode', I suggest that work to date has obscured an understanding of films made by cine-clubs within the highly organised film culture of the British amateur cine movement. The main body of the thesis consists of four chapters exploring the most popular generic practices of 'institutionalised' amateur filmmakers, focusing on: art cinema, the 'film play', community filmmaking, and the amateur heritage picture. I argue that these production strands were formed by discourses circulating within amateur film journals, 'how to do it' manuals and amateur film festivals. Amateur cinema was viewed throughout as a parallel cine movement existing alongside professional practices, enjoying an ambivalent relationship to inherited professional standards. The final chapter, 'Amateur Film Re-Located', proposed a fresh theorisation of 'local' amateur production within a national film culture, marked by distinctly cosmopolitan connections.

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# Introduction

'The cultivated amateur, who touches life on many sides, perceives
that the professional is apt to approach life from one side only.'

(Perry 1904: 24)

'Virtually every general history of cinema awards hegemony to the
commercial narrative feature film.'

(Camper 1986: 9)

Despite its popularity over time, amateur cinema has been marginalized by most conventional

film histories. What preliminary sketches have appeared of the movement tend to work away

from specifically filmic concerns, towards the contextual. Standardised narratives explaining

the 'rise and fall' of amateur film-making in relation to its major technological developments

abound. As Laraine Cookson has noted, 'Unlike commercially-produced narrative and

documentary films, or the work of independent and avant-grade filmmakers, amateur film has

been discussed mainly in terms of its technology, with little attention given to its aesthetic,

cultural and historical perspectives.' (1993: 5) Therefore the cameras that were used rather than

the films that were made, define the history of amateur cinema: illustrating the 'how' rather

than the 'why' of amateur film production. This is at least partly due to the lack of visibility

and/or accessibility of representative films. When we think of other major movements in film

history, individual titles can usually be named to illustrate shared formal characteristics:

German Expressionism and *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1919) have become synonymous, as

have Soviet Montage and *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), or the French New Wave and *Breathless*

(1959). Yet despite being an international movement from the outset, amateur cinema currently

has no representative films that invoke precise meanings by their mere mention. In fact, not

only does no history of 'exceptional' amateur films exist, we even lack a basic outline of the

generic properties of *ordinary* amateur film production. Into this void of knowledge about the

recent past, only small steps can be made.

Lacking a basic framework within which to place films produced under the auspices of the amateur sector, samples of film production from representative spheres might be put forward for initial comparison. A more general history can emerge from a number of smaller more focused studies. This thesis was developed with that possible outcome in mind. It attempts to outline the basic generic characteristics of amateur cinema as they developed in Scotland, over a period of fifty years. A project of this nature is now made feasible by developments in the film archive sector since the late 1970s. Before systematic collections of this material were made a cultural priority, the dispersed nature of the amateur cine movement meant that scholars would have to spend most of their time gathering and collecting, rather than viewing and writing. This situation has now changed thanks to the efforts of the archive sector. Now film scholars can reap the benefits of the considerable groundwork, which has taken over thirty years to put in place.

Systematic study of material housed in the Scottish Screen Archive suggests that while some of the early assumptions about the amateur cine movement can be grounded in filmic and print evidence, other assertions need to be revised. However, before this more specific study can be pursued, more general theoretical frameworks need to be established. This thesis therefore begins with a consideration of definitions of amateurism, next moving on to a brief history of the British and Scottish amateur cine movement, before finally outlining the chapters which follow, and offering an explanation of the overall methodology employed. The central ambition of this study is to approach this material from a fresh perspective, one that is usually suppressed in investigations of this kind: namely, what is the relationship between amateurism and filmmaking/viewing? This will be explored in relation to various genres, but it is clear that there is no one single answer to this central question. Rather, this thesis demonstrates the incredibly *fluid* nature of amateurism.

While it is difficult to propose an a-historical definition of amateurism, as the case studies that follow will demonstrate, a working definition at this point is useful. In general, there are currently two broad connotative fields regularly attached to the 'amateur', the most common involving the negative attributes of ineptitude, and being 'unskilful' that are common in everyday usage. It is these assumptions that my study aims to challenge by offering discernible evidence of amateur accomplishment, and re-instating former understandings of the term. In the first half of the twentieth century to be labelled 'amateur' was not in any way derogatory or insulting, rather it was something to savour and enjoy.

A much more precise definition is offered by economics; here we run into the seeming paradox of the amateur: they are defined economically (as not being professional) but the *motivations* behind making these films are not those of profit. Therefore to be an amateur connotes the investment without rewards, a potentially self-abnegating activity. The etymology of the term 'amateur' becomes a useful way out of this paradox, *amãre*: meaning 'to love'. To love the pursuit in itself, without seeking financial compensation for your efforts, is a form of idealism that is so out of step with contemporary ideologies that it requires a historical explanation to be properly grasped.

Various authors have attempted to account for these transformations in our understandings of the amateur during the past one hundred and thirty years. Two early examples of these tendencies include Bliss Perry's, *The Amateur Spirit* (1904), and Lewis and Maude's, *Professional People* (1952). These two books represent diametrically opposed responses to the same phenomena. While Perry celebrates the benefits of the life of vigorously pursued leisure activity, by contrast, Lewis and Maude opt to analyse and dissect the social

changes brought about by the increased focus on the professional sphere by the majority of the population since the industrial revolution.

These two opposing perspectives described above are united in the work of the leisure studies scholar Robert A. Stebbins, in monographs such as *Amateurs: On the Margin Between Work and Leisure* (1979) and *Between Work and Leisure: The Common Ground of Two Separate Worlds* (2004). The search for the optimal lifestyle continues to this day. Working within the discipline of Sociology these studies work towards a more accurate definition of the 'amateur' than has been proposed up until now (Craven 2006). Stebbins demonstrates that the common sense usage of the term 'amateur' is often contradictory and imprecise in its meanings. He suggests that a triangle of relationships make up this network: caught between professionals, amateurs, and the public (P.A.P). Recognition of these tensions between these various individuals, groups, and audience members, will inform much of what follows.

In specific relation to amateur film, this inter-related network between production and exhibition provides a useful framework for fresh consideration of amateur cinema. Stebbins' term 'serious leisure' is particularly useful in an attempt to locate seemingly contradictory impulses within amateur cinema culture, and to explain the need to organise local leisure activity within the national regulations and bodies. At this point, a brief history of these policies and organisations as they informed and shaped amateur cinema within Britain is a useful supplement to the more abstract definitions outlined above, while also anticipating the empirical studies of the main body of this thesis.

*A Short History of the Organisation of the Amateur Cine Movement in Britain*

The amateur cine movement within Britain was intimately tied up with the fortunes of both the film societies and sponsored filmmaking. In fact this relationship was direct and tangible, as

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most cine-clubs were divisions of film societies, and on occasion were recruited into the making of sponsored films. This was the case for the Waverley, Edinburgh and Glasgow Film Societies, and early findings suggest that this pattern was consistent with the rest of the U.K.

One early history, *A Popular Account of the Development of the Amateur Ciné Movement in Great Britain*, by Marjorie A. Lovell Burgess, claims that the 'first amateur (silent) film, of which there appears to be any trace, was a scenic made in Egypt, in 1901, by the late E.W Mellor, treasurer of the Royal Photographic Society for nine or ten years.' (1932: 5) The most useful thing about this tentative assertion is that rather than offering just a history of amateur film technology, it inaugurates the beginnings of a history of amateur *films*. While almost certainly in need of empirical testing and perhaps even revision, in light of the huge developments in the film archiving around the world, it does at least attempt to pin-point a definitive turning point in the history of amateur film production, something most histories of the sector avoid altogether.

Turning the focus away from individual films and towards the history of cine-clubs, we again find her historical discourse bearing the marks of what Keith Jenkins terms 'epistemological fragility' (1991: 11). Burgess notes:

> I believe the first amateur cine club in the world was started in Cambridge in 1923, under the title of the Cambridge Kiné Club. Amateur film making activities first began in this country about 1922. Filming began at Oxford in 1924 (1932: 4-5).

The language of this paragraph suggests that this is merely speculation, implying that historians of the sector need to be careful. The involvement of the author in these activities herself implies that this account is based on first-hand observation and memory, rather than comparative studies of primary evidence. There is a danger that the élites, of whom Marjorie A. Lovell Burgess was clearly a member, are casting themselves as the pioneers within this

early history of the amateur cine movement. As E.H Carr warned, 'Study the historian before you begin to study the facts.' (1987: 23). While it is well established that the expense of purchasing cameras and developing film stock precluded all but the wealthiest members of society from fully participating in amateur filmmaking during its early years, these anecdotal historical accounts should be treated sceptically for now.

In terms of the history of organisations, Burgess is much more sure of herself. She writes that the '...first amateur film convention was held in Torquay, in 1928, under the auspices of the Devon Amateur Film Production.' (5) Three years later, this was followed by the "The Era" Challenge Cup Contest, which was significant, not only because Burgess herself initiated it, but also 'for the first time the amateur ciné movement in Great Britain knew organised professional co-operation.' (5) This contest was held in The Gaumont Film House in Wardour Street, London, and the judging panel included prominent industry figures such as Michael Balcon, Anthony Asquith and Ben Carlton, 'one of the best known pioneers of the amateur ciné movement.' (5) However, this history is very London-centric, a perspective perhaps justifiable within the commercial film industry, but extremely limited in terms of amateur cinema.

Two separate but related strands need to be singled out to understand the development of amateur film culture in Scotland: the film society movement and the growth of cine-clubs. Each of these overlapping movements played an essential part in generating an active film culture in the early decades of the twentieth century. The establishment of film societies in both Glasgow and Edinburgh nourished film appreciation in Scotland, as Adrienne Scullion explains:

> Where Grierson's documentaries pushed the notion of film-as-public service, as educator and film-as-weapon, other groups were equally examining film-as-art. Scotland was at the forefront of this remarkably popular movement. 1925 saw the founding of the

London Film Society. On 22 November 1929 the Glasgow Film
Society was founded with an initial membership of 80 (but rising to
over 400 by 1932-1933). In the following year the Edinburgh Film
Guild was formed (1990: 49).

These two film societies were integral in raising film literacy amongst the public, showing

films that were often out of circulation in the commercial cinemas. They also offered

organisational models for the smaller cities and towns around Scotland, which aspired to form

and run their own local film societies. Such impulses were re-enforced by the early formation

of the Federation of Scottish Film Societies, an organisation that the critic Forsyth Hardy

played a key role in founding. As he explained in an interview published in the edited

collection *Scotch Reels*:

> There was a Federation of Scottish Film Societies formed when there
> were only three film societies. I was the Secretary for some twenty-
> five years, and helped to form all these other film societies. As the
> pressure was getting under way to set up the British Film Institute,
> there was a strong film society movement in Scotland and an equally
> strong educational film movement...In England at that time there
> was no Federation of Film Societies and there was no educational
> film association of any kind (McArthur 1982: 82).

Such early intervention helps to explain the presence of such an active film society, and hence

cine club culture, north of the border. Crucially, this foresight in regards to the organisation of

the film appreciation movement, slowly built an audience educated in a particular version of

film history. These very people were easily recruited from film appreciation into film

production, when the standardisation of 16mm camera equipment became relatively affordable

for film society members. Such groupings would form both the main body of filmmakers and

audience members for cine club production over the next fifty years.

An article written by prominent Scottish amateur filmmaker, Frank Marshall in 1955,

provides a much-needed Scottish supplement to this largely mainly metropolitan perspective

on cine club culture. On the occasion of the twenty-first anniversary of the Scottish Film

Council, Marshall wrote a short piece based on his extensive first-hand experience of the amateur film scene in Scotland over the preceding years. I will explore his film practices in chapter three of this thesis, but for now his central role in the formation of the organisational structure of the Scottish amateur cine movement provides a useful reference point. At the time of writing, both the film society and the cine club movements were at the height of their popularity. He noted that:

> It is estimated that in Scotland there are some 200 people actively interested in the production of amateur films, as distinct from the very much larger number who use cine cameras for personal record and amusement (1955: 37).

The division between home moviemakers and cine club members is clear from this comment, a division that as we will see, has not always been grasped by later writers on the amateur sector. The cine clubs, not the home moviemakers, were where 'serious leisure' activity could be found, involving a much higher degree of co-operation and organisation. Marshall's history of the Scottish amateur film sector begins only one year after the first Era Challenge Cup Contest. He claims that, 'The organised Amateur Movement in Scotland may be said to have begun in 1932 with the formation of the Meteor Film Producing Society in Glasgow.' (37) This society became important not only for the high quality films that they made during the 1930s, but also for inaugurating the first Scottish Amateur Film Festival in 1933 (McBain 1997: 97-105). Each of Marshall's 'some two hundred' filmmakers would be making films, often for the express purpose of entering them in the next amateur film contest.

The most notable feature of both the film society and the cine club movement was that in their subsequent development, neither movement was exclusively metropolitan. As Marshall notes:

> The oldest and largest active club in Scotland is the Edinburgh Cine Society, founded in 1936, and having the distinction of owning its

own cinema and club rooms. Glasgow has two active clubs, the Glasgow Cine Club and the Pearce Institute, and there are also producing units in Wishaw, Dundee, Aberdeen and Ayr (38).

In contrast to the production of sponsored films in Scotland, which tended to be located mainly in Glasgow and Edinburgh, these cine clubs were to be found all around Scotland. This was the strength of the movements, allowing as it did, voices from all over the country to make films that would be seen locally, nationally and sometimes even internationally. The film society and cine club movements were in this respect *de-centred*, operating at some remove from the main institutions of media production in the country, even while the origins of the sector were still located in the cities, as were the main contests.

As the sector developed, it became more obvious that a national organisation was needed to co-ordinate amateur film culture in Scotland. In this regard Frank Marshall, being one of the leaders, was well placed to describe the aspirations of this particular move:

> In 1949, in response to many requests following a conference on the use of amateur films organised by the Scottish Film Council, the Scottish Association of Amateur Cinematographer was formed. Its objects are to stimulate the production and improve the quality of amateur films and to co-ordinate and speak for the amateur film movement in Scotland (39).

By this time, amateur film as an organised cultural activity was beginning to gather pace as not just a local and national phenomena, but also as an international movement. Key to this development was the formation of the Union Internationale du Cinema d'Amateurs (U.N.I.C.A), which was formed in 1934. This organisation played a central role in facilitating dialogue and cultural exchange amongst its member countries, but to benefit from these international developments, a nationally organised cine culture had to be firmly in place. Once accepted into this fold, Scotland gained considerable recognition as the host country of the tenth annual International Congress and Contest of U.N.I.C.A. The film record of this event,

*U.N.I.C.A Glasgow, 1951* (1951, 13.55 mins, colour/silent) opens with Frank Marshall and his wife, welcoming delegates from the fourteen member countries, attesting to his central role in the development of the amateur cine movement in Scotland.

## *Categories, Definitions, and Genres*

Despite all this participant activity, scholarly work on amateur film has been uneven in its development. The reasons behind this will be explored in more depth in chapter one, but a few comments need to be made in order to explain my choice of methodology in this respect. This thesis chiefly addresses problems of categorisation of amateur cinema: including both categories based on empirical evidence, such as mode of production and generic forms, but I also attempt to re-formulate more recent theoretical categories developed by scholars of amateur film. Such problems of demarcation are identified in an article published in 1997, by Bert Hogenkamp and Mieke Lauwers, who note that:

> Remarkably, some of the basic terminology that forms the backbone of this discussion has never been defined clearly. Words and phrases like substandard film, family film, home movie, hobby film, private film, *inédits* and even egodocument are assigned a meaning, but more often than not they are used interchangeably (1997:107).

This 'basic' observation has been a stimulus to the formation of the terminology developed through this thesis. While projects centred on amateur film are still regularly re-categorised by contemporary film scholars as studies of the 'non-theatrical', or even more problematically, as 'small gauge' cinema, the terminology seems to become ever more ill-defined. In relation to the latter example, technological definitions are particularly slippery, as Hogenkamp and Lauwers remind us, 'film gauge alone does not indicate whether a film is amateur or professional.' (109) Rather than suppressing the *amateur* nature of this material, as these two

examples tend to do, this thesis will deal directly with the descriptive problems that have been previously identified.

Through the coming chapters, I will be exploring issues around authorship (often collective) and genre. My approach will be to focus my case studies on individual films and filmmakers within specified artistic, social, and wider historical contexts. The relationship between the specific and the general, the individual film and generic formulations, will function as constant opposites that must be negotiated in order to push knowledge of amateur cinema forward. Resulting interpretations are therefore not final, but rather attempts at what E.H Carr called 'a continuous process of interaction' between theoretical propositions and the available empirical evidence (1987:30).

Issues of genre have been relatively neglected by scholarship on amateur film. Work has tended to concentrate on films that, as I will demonstrate, tend to fit into pre-defined conceptions of amateurism, rather than considering films that challenge common sense assumptions about the sector. As Hogenkamp and Lauwers assert:

> Having viewed many films, we are forced to conclude that the
> clichés about amateur film are refuted in most cases. It is probably a
> form of snobbery and disdain to pick out exactly those amateur films
> that substantiate the clichés and hold them for the general standard
> (111).

The films that I have viewed in the Scottish Screen archive escape the more condescending attitudes of people unfamiliar with material of this type. Building on this observation, in chapter one, entitled 'Theorising Amateur Film: Limitations and Possibilities', I detail the domination of amateur cinema studies by discussion of the 'home mode', suggesting that work to date has discouraged the exploration of films made by cine-clubs within the highly organised film culture of the British amateur cine movement. Films made by people involved with this movement in turn were remarkably diverse, and should not be theorised as if they

were uniform: rather, 'Amateur films comes in all shapes, sizes and genres.' (Hogenkamp and Lauwers:112)

The reaction these films prompt from spectators depends to a great extent on the generic forms that are being drawn on and, in some exceptional instances, re-worked. The main body of the thesis therefore consists of four chapters examining the most popular generic practices of 'institutionalised' amateur filmmakers, focusing on: art cinema, the 'film play', community filmmaking, and the amateur heritage picture. I argue that these production strands were formed by discourses circulating within amateur film journals, 'how to do it' manuals and amateur film festivals. However, like the streams of films produced by this movement, these four chapters are of a fundamentally *divided* nature.

Chapters two and three have been labelled, 'Aspirational Models: Towards or Beyond Professional Modes'. The focus here is on fiction films whose generic practices were mostly formed by professional discourse: animation, the fantasy film, comedies and action movies. Most of these filmmakers were attempting with these productions to enter the film industry proper, and their films bear the marks of this ambition. By contrast, chapters four and five have been labelled, 'Uniquely Amateur Modes and Wilful Separation'. The focus here is mostly on non-fiction output whose generic practices were mostly formed by 'uniquely' amateur discourse: club films, workers newsreels/ community films, posterity productions and amateur re-makes.

These 'uniquely' amateur genres are currently much less well known. The amateur versions of commercial generic products tend to receive more attention from current scholarship because they are more firmly established, and familiar to contemporary researchers. By contrast, uniquely amateur genres are only recoverable from primary evidence such as the amateur film journals and in the archive. However, this work does not only entail a recovery of the history of generic practices, but should also include suggestions for useful

categories based on observable evidence. As Rick Altman warns in relation to the study of generic practices within commercial cinema:

> Because genres are taken to be 'out there', existing independently of observers, genre theorists have generally sought to describe and define what they believe to be already existing genres rather than create their own interpretative categories, however applicable or useful (1999: 11).

Therefore, scholars of amateur film need to be alert to possible connections to be made between seemingly diverse titles. This more active attitude to the writing of film history suggests that the researcher may have a more substantial impact on the development of the study of amateur cinema, within both the university and the archive sector, than is possibly the case in more mature disciplinary areas. These eight individual case studies combine historical approaches and close analysis, and imply avenues for future research.

*Amateur Film as Film*

The systematic analysis of amateur film as a formal system has been displaced from the research agenda of scholars in recent years. The leading figure in the study of amateur cinema within the university, Patricia R. Zimmermann has even questioned the value of such a pursuit:

> However, it is very difficult to theorize just how one might analyze amateur film as a text via any merely formal methodology. Amateur films in many ways do not deploy a language of cinema that can be deciphered or translated as in the case of the classical Hollywood system, the various visual tropes of documentary, or the formal interrogations of experimental film (2001: 112).

Over the coming six chapters, I will demonstrate that this observation is problematic in at least two respects. Firstly, it is based on a limited range of empirical evidence, and secondly, that it

underestimates recent developments in formalist methodology. This approach has had the effect of emphasising contextual and theoretical frameworks that remain untested by specific instances, and has identified no representative films of the amateur cine movement for wider consideration. For Zimmermann, formal analysis is synonymous with a methodology that refuses to acknowledge and incorporate determining criteria outside of the 'text', as her use of 'merely formal methodology' implies. During the 1950s, the leading poets and critics in the literary movement that became known as New Criticism, promoted this technique. This was intended to be a means of turning attention away from interpretations formed by historical contexts and biography, onto the actual poems themselves. Studies informed by this approach constantly emphasised the 'ambiguity' and 'integrated' nature of the formal system employed. In time however, its limits quickly became apparent. A variant of this method known as 'textual analysis', which is similarly blind to the constant interaction of formal and contextual factors, has become a dominant within Film Studies. This has understandably provoked something of a backlash, a tendency that Zimmerman's comment clearly echoes. However, this form of New Criticism does not influence my close analysis of films, so much as a variant method known as 'historical poetics'.

David Bordwell has developed this approach in various articles and books over the past twenty years. In these studies a move away from analysis based on what he sees as mere interpretation, towards interpretations of films and genres that are based on empirical evidence and comparative analysis (both formal and historical) is evident. As Bordwell notes, 'Historical poetics offers *explanations*, not *explications*.' (1989: 375) This approach helps produce knowledge by asking two basic questions:

> 1. What are the principles according to which films are constructed
> and by means of which they achieve particular effects?
> 2. How and why have the principles arisen and changed in particular
> empirical circumstances? (371)

This method informs the eight case studies that form the main body of this study. From *Hell Untld* (1936) to *Around Wick Harbour* (1974/75), attention is sharply focused on the films themselves, which are understood both in relation to other amateur films, but also within the ever changing dynamics of the wider amateur cine movement over a period of fifty years. Within the study of amateur cinema, like the more developed areas of Film Studies described above, there still exists a tension between genre theory and genre history. By being aware of the relationship, we can complicate any tendencies towards overly simplistic taxonomies of generic practices. As Altman points out:

> Genre history holds a shifting and uncertain place in relation to genre theory. Most often simply disregarded by its synchronically orientated partner, genre history nevertheless cries out for increased attention by virtue of its ability to scramble generic codes, to blur established generic tableaux and to muddy accepted generic ideas. At times, genre history has been used creatively in support of specific institutional goals, for example by creating a new canon of works supportive of a revised genre theory (12).

A creative tension of this sort between theory and history is sustained throughout this study, as attention is focused on both exceptional fiction films and the more ordinary non-fiction film. This reveals clear changes, over the decades towards certain generic practices and away from others, which can be traced by audience reactions to certain types of films published in newspapers and elsewhere at the time. In some quarters there exists a similar ambition to incorporate production and exhibition into the analyses of both ordinary and exceptional films. As Hogenkamp and Lauwers urge towards the conclusion of their article:

> However, more consideration should be given to production, particularly with regard to hobby film...There is also need for further research into the reception of hobby films. This not only concerns *inédits*, but also films that have been screened in public...Finally, it seems worthwhile to subject specific family and hobby films to further scrutiny (115).

Although broadly sharing such sentiments, my studies are not divided along the lines they suggest, but rather along the aforementioned boundary between fiction and non-fiction. Following these thematic studies, the final chapter, 'Amateur Film Re-Located: Localism in Fact and Fiction', proposes a fresh theorisation of 'local' amateur production within a national film culture, marked by distinctly cosmopolitan connections. Therefore these individual case studies are book-ended by two theoretical chapters: moving from the synchronic to the diachronic and back again. Amateur cinema is viewed throughout as a parallel cine movement existing alongside professional practices, enjoying an *ambivalent* relationship to inherited professional standards.

# Chapter 1-
## Theorising Amateur Film:
## Limitations and Possibilities

Theoretical consideration of amateur film has to be one of the most neglected aspects of film studies. Despite the vitality of the worldwide amateur film movement from the early 1930s to the late 1970s, Anglo-American film scholars have made only intermittent attempts at engaging with the films produced during this period, as diverse as *Hell Unltd* (Norman McLaren and Helen Biggar, 1936), *Let Glasgow Flourish* (Dawn Cine Group, 1952/56) and *It Happened Here* (Kevin Brownlow, 1963). It has now been over ten years since the last book was published on amateur film, yet there have been few significant further interventions into the field. While important studies have emerged in the last few years, there has tended to be a deep divide between empirical research and theoretical critique. For example, Melinda Stone's (2003: 220-237) otherwise exemplary study of an individual cine-club uses primary research to recreate the highly active culture of monthly meetings, newsletters and film contests; however it does not attempt to situate its findings in relation to the established theoretical debates within amateur film studies, a limitation that underplays the importance of the evidence. Conversely, as I will show, ambitious theoretical statements have been made that take little account of the huge growth of film archives around the world in the last few decades, and hence widen their analysis to the amateur films that were actually made. This divide between empirical research and theory is impoverishing understanding of amateur film, and I suggest that the current gulf between data and theory needs to be narrowed. Within the study of professional cinema, David Bordwell has noted that 'being empirical does not rule out being theoretical', and has made a powerful case for what he calls middle-level research (1996a: 27). The intention of this particular study is therefore to argue for middle-level *theorising* as the preferred practice within the study of amateur film.

It is clear that due to the limitations of the current debates, misconceptions about the amateur film movement and its relevance to contemporary film studies abound. While the films made by both individuals and groups over a fifty-year period were varied and unpredictable, scholarly research has been surprisingly myopic in its focus. The three main trends of thought that recur again and again in most analyses are the *domestic*, the *oppositional* and the more recent development of the *evidential*. These mark the dominant positions that scholars have recourse to when trying to understand what amateur film *is*. They function both as tools for understanding what this particular mode of cultural production can do, as well as for its legitimisation.

It is important to grasp these basic positions, so that work can begin on the areas unconsidered by analyses that develop from these well-established vantage points. Attention to these overlooked aspects will form the second part of this chapter, when I argue that theoretical frameworks developed for the analysis of home movies are insufficient to cover amateur film production as a whole. For the past thirty years, scholarly attention has focused stubbornly on home movies at the expense of films that have a closer 'fit' with the theory and analysis that scholars within Film Studies pursue. This bizarre situation, I suggest towards the end of the chapter, is the direct consequence of problems of critical categorisation that require refinement. However, first it is necessary to outline the well-established perspectives and how they function within contemporary film theory.

*The Domestic and the Non-Professional*

The first perspective identifies amateur cinema with the ethnography of domestic family life. The work of Richard Chalfen, a scholar who is mainly interested in the communicative function of home photography, brought these cultural documents to the attention of the

academy during the 1980s. Chalfen also extends his empirical research and analysis into a chapter on the social use of home movies, and suggests a methodological framework to understand the *social* functions of these films (1987: 49-69). Drawing on Sol Worth's work on filmmaking practices that developed when people on Navajo reservations were given access to camera technology, Chalfen sees home moviemaking as one method of re-enforcing pre-existing social relationships, this time within the nuclear family (Worth 1974). As a social scientist, his work is interested in how these films are *used* within this context.

The major innovation of Chalfen's study, *Snapshot Versions of Life*, is the introduction of the category 'home mode' to describe this process of social communication. He writes, 'The "home mode" is described as a pattern of interpersonal and group communication centred in the home.' (1987: 8) He continues, 'this concept of "mode" is not equated with a specific medium of communication. The same mediums- writing, painting, drawing, photography, film, videotape- can be used for both mass communication and home mode communication.'(1987: 9) The home mode is neither defined by the medium nor the technology used: home movies can be made with 35mm, 16mm or 8mm cameras. In short, the home mode is not a *genre* of amateur cultural production, but rather an *exhibition space* where self-produced materials are shown to the intended audience of family and close friends.

Within this mode, Chalfen introduces terms such as 'Kodak Culture' and 'Polaroid People' to describe its characteristics and agents. The former describes 'whatever it is that one has to learn, know, or do in order to participate appropriately in what has been outlined as the home mode of pictorial communication' (1987: 10). These rules tend to be communicated to users by instruction manuals. It is notable that a corporation name is the signifier of instructional culture; a choice that indicates the centrality of a few major companies in defining the debates. Later writers on amateur film would develop the implications of these nomenclatures. The latter 'is used to provoke an inventory (or "topography") of specific

people, places, and things that regularly appear in the photograph collection' (1987: 11). This would include activities in domestic family life, such as games in the garden, birthdays and holidays. All of these activities also provide typical scenes in home movies.

For Chalfen, these terms construe the home mode of communication as a prime site witnessing the transformation of the real world into the 'symbolic world' of film language; furnishing images that aim to shine happiness back onto the participating family, preserved against the degradations of time:

> These patterns of patterned change remain stable through time. And so, while photographic collections document changes, these changes are predictable, stable, culturally expected and approved. In this way photography maintains a culturally structured status quo (1987: 141).

By tending mostly to record moments that capture the process of healthy growth, successful achievement and happy family moments, a certain picture of family life begins to emerge from home moviemaking. These selective representations are not intentionally misleading; they merely perform the specific social function of projecting an idealised image back onto the participants. The analysis of how these representations are constructed formally continues in what might be considered a contradiction in terms: detailing the formal characteristics of a filmmaking practice that is not in the least interested in form.

The major breakthrough of *Snapshot Versions of Life* is to question assumptions concerning acceptable aesthetic practice in films made for the domestic environment. While professional filmmakers criticise home moviemakers for poor use of technique, this ignores the specificity of the home mode of communication. According to Chalfen, the most popular form of writing on amateur filmmaking, 'How To Do It' manuals, are also based on the same misunderstanding.[1] As Chalfen notes, 'Interviews with home moviemakers revealed an

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[1] For an example of this tendency see Peter Gowland, *How to Take Better Home Movies* (New York: Arco Publishing, 1957).

undesirable conflict between the ideal of spontaneity and the good intentions of planning a movie.' (1987:51) This conflict could be for any number of reasons, including a naive belief that editing *manipulates* a filmic record unnecessarily, when home moviemakers set out to '*reproduce* a reality' in real time (1987: 57). A more plausible argument is that planning 'may represent an unwelcome intrusion of "work" into what is classified by most people as "play."'(1987: 55) This observation is useful in highlighting the specific social reasons why home movies apparently display such a lack of interest in formal aesthetics.

While Richard Chalfen's work has certainly pushed the debate forward, its approach is not without its limitations. As he is working within the scholarly conventions of social science, specifically visual anthropology, his research priorities are not necessarily those that would be favoured within the humanities. For example he notes:

> the present study has developed from a relatively static synchronic look at pictorial forms that actually record changes in peoples lives. Much work remains to be done on how conventions, sanctions, and related behaviours change *diachronically*- through time- and how technical, social and cultural factors contribute to such changes (1987: 97).

His study privileges the synchronic over the diachronic, providing a static snapshot of home moviemaking within the family at a particular moment. The most obvious direction in which this work could be developed is in the aforementioned diachronic direction, and the generation of a historical context to home movies all the way back to aristocratic families using 35mm cameras at the turn of the twentieth century. Chalfen also acknowledges that his study only focused on visual evidence provided by a very narrow section of the community, namely the middle-class of the American Mid-West. Future researchers into home movies would do well to ask how representative this material might be. However, the material of the home mode

could also be analysed in relation to questions of personal and familial memory: an approach much more suited to the methodologies of humanities scholars.

Towards the end of *Snapshot Versions of Life*, Richard Chalfen comes to some quite bitter conclusions about the ethnographic value of these particular home movies. A piece of writing he quotes by Denise McCluggage, from an issue of *American Home* (December 1972) on the cultural value of snapshots, makes this point well:

> Future anthropologists, if they studied our culture from home photo albums alone, would probably conclude that this breed of man lived mostly at Christmas, indulged in a ritual with colored eggs at Easter, graduated from institutions frequently, celebrated birthdays mostly while young and had lots of small animals. Further, they would conclude, children were usually fresh scrubbed, and spent a great deal of time standing around squinting into the sun (1987: 170-71).

Richard Chalfen concurs as he quotes Margery Mann, 'Few of today's amateur snapshots would provide a future anthropologist with any insight into the culture that produced them.' (1987: 167) It is on this melancholy note that Chalfen concludes his study. However, while the home movies scrutinised may not be especially useful anthropologically, he suggested a new approach to home movies, where the power of explanation moves from the family who made the movie to the scholar who studies them.

Crucially in the present context, Richard Chalfen scarcely confronts the latent issues of what it means to be an *amateur* who makes movies. Mostly he avoids the use of the term 'amateur' altogether, preferring the less loaded designation, 'non-professional' (1975a). This slippage suggests the real problem of constructing the home mode as a metonym for amateur film in general. Chalfen was not directly addressing questions of amateurism; rather he was studying only *one* sphere of non-professional cultural production, the family. Amateurism has here however become synonymous with the domestic life, but this forms a limited definition that needs to be challenged, as the next section will make clearer.

The critical position that tends to be the one adopted most frequently by writers on amateur cinema is that of the mode as *oppositional* practice. This is perhaps understandable, given that amateur film seems to offer the opportunity to experiment and subvert from outside the commercial mainstream. From this perspective, amateur film poses a direct challenge to the conformity of mass movie making, and 'democratises' the means of cultural production.

Most of the debate in this context so far has centred on critical studies of amateur film *journals* rather than actual film production, so these ideas are traced in this context. The arguments that can be recovered, through articles written by practitioners such as Maya Deren and Jonas Mekas, gave voice to oppositional impulses that were put into practice in their filmmaking activity. Writing within the context of the artistic avant-garde during the 1950s, their work was published in small-circulation, specialist arts and film journals such as *Film Culture*. Their readership centred on the artistic community, not the general public, so the cultural values and reference points tended to be from painting, poetry and literature rather than from consumer culture. In fact, they were actively hostile to mainstream culture, which they viewed as full of artistic compromise and inherently degraded: the only alternative being to construct a 'purer' alternative film practice (James 1992). From this perspective, amateur filmmaking gives voice to areas of concern that are repressed by the status quo.

One of the main concepts deployed by writers who were part of the avant-garde movement was *freedom*. Maya Deren talks about two forms of freedom, the first of which is freedom in the *artistic* sense. From her point of view the main benefit that the amateur has is freedom from sponsorship and the expectations that corporate funding brings to the final film. As Deren notes:

Artistic freedom means that the amateur filmmaker is never forced to sacrifice visual drama and beauty to a stream of words, words, words, words, to the relentless activity and explanations of a plot, or to the display of a star or a sponsor's product; nor is the amateur production expected to return profit on a huge investment by holding the attention of a massive and motley audience for 90 minutes...Instead of trying to invent a plot that moves, use the movement of wind, or water, children, people, elevators, balls, etc. as a poem might celebrate these. And use your freedom to experiment with visual ideas; your mistakes will not get you fired (1965: 45-46).

Low-budget film production has always been seen as the privileged site where artistry can potentially flourish. From the European art cinema to the B-movies of the Hollywood studio system, critics have often noted that when working outside the heavily regulated production line, stylistic experiments can be pursued without interference. Here Deren is acting as an advocate of a non-industrial mode of production, with the amateur as the true patron of artistry in the cinema. This passage, in its commitment to an aesthetic of silent filmmaking, also demonstrates the archaic quality of writing on amateur film during the 1960s. While the professional cinema had integrated sound into its symbolic system, amateur filmmaking was still being seen as a potential site of *resistance*: preserving a visual style for the amateur, that had long since been superseded by sound technology in other cinemas. The mainstream's innovations leave a space for the amateur to exploit. Here amateurism is synonymous with artistry.

The second way Maya Deren talks about freedom is in the *physical* sense. The New York avant-garde embraced the new cheap cameras and projectors that came on the market. In these mass-produced technologies the artistic avant-garde invested their utopian hopes and desires for a future filmmaking practice: one that broke with the practices of the past (Sitney 1971). In particular they championed the lightweight technology of 16mm, and more especially by 1965 (when the article 'Amateur Versus Professional' was published) the 8mm cameras that were becoming readily available to many middle-class families in the United States. Writers

such as Deren were writing in a polemical way to discourage people from using these cameras *functionally*, i.e. the documentation impulse of home movies, and instead to encourage people to use their technology in a *non-practical* artistic fashion. Her writings show how excited she was by the possibilities of developments in 'sub-standard' film technology in the hands of an artist:

> Don't forget that no tripod has yet been built which is as miraculously versatile in movement as the complex system of supports, joints, muscles and nerves which is the human body, which, with a bit of practice, makes possible the enormous variety of camera angles and visual action. You have all this, and a brain too, in one neat, compact mobile package (1965: 46).

The movement of the camera during filming was a site of controversy in amateur circles. While most amateurs were advised not to draw attention to the camera by excessive movement or unusual camera angles, here Deren advises the very opposite. She encourages the amateur to make full use of the lightweight camera and to forge an aesthetic practice that the professional would disapprove of. Anthropomorphic camera movement here becomes the signature technique of a filmic practice that is defining itself in *opposition* to the smooth and controlled locomotion of professional film style. This points towards a dichotomy that has been influential on much later writing on amateur film. The title of the article is 'Amateur Versus Professional', which in itself is revealing of an antagonistic attitude. This theoretical opposition has been unproductive in the long run, as is evident from the ways in which these debates have developed as they entered Film Studies.

The first scholarly monograph on amateur film was Patricia Zimmermann's *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (1995). This book was based on her PhD thesis, which was entitled *Reel Families: A Social History of the Discourse on Amateur Film 1897-*

*1962.*[2] The change of title is significant and telling. Without it, the impression is created that Zimmermann's study aims toward a complete history of amateur film, when her work is actually an examination of the ideological discourses running through American amateur film journals and other primary documents. While this has been a major contribution to scholarship on amateur film, it has to be seen in the larger context as a small part of a mostly unexplored domain.

While earlier writers such as Maya Deren and Harry Alan Potamkin influenced *Reel Families*, key ideas alluded to within the Deren article are taken in a more scholarly direction. Zimmermann performs a much more rigorous analysis of journals and documents on amateur film than had been accomplished outside of Film Studies. She situates amateur film within an industrial and socio-economic framework, which enriches the considerable primary research on written documents, and also pushes the work in the diachronic direction that Chalfen had anticipated. However, the general conclusions of her work are not beyond criticism. The central thesis of *Reel Families* is summed up in the following extract:

> From 1897 to 1962 amateur-film discourse incrementally relocated amateur filmmaking within a romanticized vision of the bourgeois nuclear family, thereby amputating its more resistant economic and political potential for critique (1995: x).

Now, while the first part of this statement is most likely true (whilst still open to empirical question) the second part of this passage does not necessarily follow from the first. Here Zimmermann sees amateur filmmaking in general as being constrained by the non-oppositional practices that most people pursue in their home moviemaking. However, the one does not necessarily have a negative effect on the other. Avant-garde practices still persisted as a minority activity well into the 1970s, even while the majority of amateurs showed no interest

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[2] Patricia R. Zimmermann, *Reel Families: A Social History of the Discourse on Amateur Film 1897-1962* (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1984).

in this form of filmic activity. The popularity of home movies does not mean that histories of the amateur avant-garde cannot also be traced.

The misleading nature of this thesis is perhaps a result of Zimmermann's focus on pre-war amateur film. In her article studies of the discourses of the amateur avant-garde, she focuses on the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s.[3] This was a period when avant-garde writers and filmmakers were particularly active in the United States. However, when these articles are updated into monograph form, no subsequent research is evident into whether this activity persisted into the post-war era. Instead, judging by the evidence of amateur film journals, and under the spell of the Frankfurt School of cultural criticism, Zimmermann concluded that the corporations of America conspired to frustrate avant-gardist ambitions. The adoption of this pessimistic political model blinds her to the variety of film production that actually took place amongst post-war amateurs.

The problem however, is that Zimmermann displays little interest in the relatively mainstream cinema that these amateurs produced. Running through her writings is a deep suspicion of the dominance of Hollywood on the formation of an amateur film aesthetic. Like Chalfen, she objects to film journals and manuals advising amateurs to make their films into coherent narratives: seeing such prescription as indexing dominant commercial ideology intruding into properly 'free' leisure pursuits. This suspicion of the ideological effects of narrative was once common among film theorists, but has been replaced by a more nuanced understanding of popular culture than political modernism allowed.

The confusions which result from this 'oppositional' stance can be seen in the schizophrenic attitude Zimmermann takes towards home movies. On the one hand, they are dismissed as reproductions of bourgeois ideology; on the other, she mounts a counter-argument

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[3] See Patricia R. Zimmermann, 'The Amateur, The Avant-Garde, and Ideologies of Art' *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 38 (1986), pp. 63-85 and 'Startling Angles: Amateur Film and the Early Avant-Garde' in Jan-Christopher Horak (ed), *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), pp. 137-155.

to re-claim home movies as symbols of resistance to conventional film aesthetics. The spontaneity of the home movie was celebrated in opposition to the control of Hollywood productions:

> Compositional technique was also a site of ideological struggle in home-movie discourse: on the one side, a controlled, static camera emulating the most mundane studio film; on the other, a mobile, intimate, and tripod-free style that exalted in lightweight amateur gear (1988: 34).

In similar vein, the labour-intensive nature of professionalism is contrasted with the lack of labour in the most indolent film activity; in a passage that echoes Maya Deren's article. Only this time it is home movies rather than the avant-garde that is being defended. Similarly again, in line with currents of contemporary feminism, the domestic space is defined against the public space, and this therefore becomes the privileged site of oppositional impulses in gender politics. At each level, such a critical practice extends by taking the most seemingly conservative cultural object, the home movie, and asserting that it contains a latent subversive critique of dominant ideology.[4] This argument once again re-enforces the commonplace that amateur film consists of nothing more than home movies, and also that the value of the amateur lies in its service to ideological critique.

Despite the differences between approaches to amateur film from domestic and oppositional perspectives, what they have in common is a recognition that both home movies and the amateur avant-garde are significantly individualist practices. As Zimmermann herself writes, 'Professionalism moulded middle-class workers into interchangeable parts; amateurism served as a safe haven for the ragged remains of bourgeois individualism.' (1997: 75) It is perhaps productive therefore to re-position these writers as working within a less subversive,

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[4] Also see Michelle Citron, *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

and more *romantic* tendency than has previously been acknowledged. Theoretically, both are excited by the possibilities of individualist filmmaking, but are ultimately disappointed by the films they find. Their analyses then represent an attempt to come to terms with this apparent schism. Neither can see any amateur practice beyond the domestic: a limitation that impoverishes both their studies. The myopic focus on the avant-garde and home movies effectively ignores other filmmaking practices that have now been mostly forgotten. An article published during the mid-nineties, 'Home Movies of the Avant Garde: Jonas Mekas and the New York Art World' unintentionally captures the lethargy of this debate, and is the logical outcome of the dominance of these two scholarly paradigms (Ruoff 1992: 294-311).

*Television and Historical Evidence*

More energy and vitality exists within the on-going debates on amateur film within the archive sector, where curators and restorers have taken the responsibility of pushing the debate forward, in the relative absence of significant academic developments. While not being as prominent in the study of amateur film as the previous variant, their mainly *evidential* perspective nonetheless plays a significant role in non-academic uses of amateur film. However, these archival concerns have recently entered academic debate via the study of television. Nonetheless, this debate has tended to proceed along predictable lines of enquiry, with some notable exceptions.

When Film Studies scholars study historical issues, it is usually in relation to changes in production and style. Films are understood within their historical context, but this is mobilised to understand the film itself, with the historical account subservient to the analysis of the film. In contrast to this approach, archivists and social historians find amateur *non-fiction* films a useful source of visual evidence (Roads 1966: 183-191). Researchers using this approach can

consult a single film to access a particular aspect of its pro-filmic world, or adopt a compare and contrast strategy, in which the historian examines footage of, say, a place, then compares it to film of that same area thirty years later. This process reveals the changes, not just in film style, but the diachronic changes that the passage of time has had on the landscape (Norris Nicholson 2002: 81-100). In this way, film almost becomes a scientific tool for the recording of moving images and objects that will be of interest to the retrospective viewer in years to come. However, this method requires supplementary material for the visual evidence to become historical knowledge. Without knowledgeable commentaries from people who can interpret the images, the film in itself can become relatively meaningless.

These issues of interpretation are key when the films are used as illustrative or supplementary material in television programmes such as *Nation on Film* (BBC), *Scotland on Film* (BBC) and *The Way It Was* (Grampian). In contrast to earlier television programmes on amateur film that aimed to be a *stimulus to production*, such as *Cine Club* (BBC, 1950- 51), *Cine Holiday* (Associated-Rediffusion, ITV, 1956), *Personal Cinema* (BBC, 1960), *Take A Cine Camera* (ATV Network, ITV, 1972) and *Happy Days* (ITV, 1983), these contemporary television programmes are more interested in *reminiscence*. Their format tends to intercut first-hand witness interviews on the issues under discussion, with visual evidence often taken from amateur (and sponsored) films that have been deposited in national and regional archives. The films being used for 'apparently' evidential purposes are not named, and are largely subservient to the memories of the interviewees. This is especially true of *Nation on Film* and *Scotland on Film*, where *moments* take priority over the integrity of the film as an integrated whole. While the less well-known programme, *The Way It Was*, used amateur film for memorial activity, both *Nation on Film* and *Scotland on Film* tend to use them for a merely illustrative function. Such evidential usage of amateur film synchronises efficiently with the historicized formation of archival policy and organisation.

Consulting the Scottish Screen Archive catalogue gives a useful insight into how these films are being indexed and graded at an institutional level.[5] The basis of this indexing is a category called 'historical value', a clear demonstration of the legitimising power of the evidential perspective.[6] Each film that is accepted into the archive collection (not all films are) is judged using a system that goes from Grade 1 (most important) to Grade 3 (least important). The official records state:

> Each title acquired is to be given a grade for its historical/ archive value, from 1-3. This grade is to indicate the value of a particular film for:
>
> a)   Its rarity
> b)   Its historical/ social significance
> c)   Its importance to the access department of the Archive.[7]

Instructions go on to list the attributes of a film to be catalogued under Grade 1, including 'Amateur footage which is credited as having been entered in the Scottish Amateur Film Festival' and 'Footage of a particular industrial/agricultural process which we hold nothing of'. The status of *fiction* films in relation to rhetoric around the evidential discourse (and the privileging of non-fiction) is revealed when films which contain 'Footage which is unique and of interest in its own right, e.g. an experimental film, or amateur fiction film, but which does not fit the Criteria for Grade 1' are identified as suitable only for cataloguing as Grade 2. Films tend to be confined to Grade 3 because they contain '...footage of any of the above subject areas, of which the archive holds a significant amount, but which still contains enough footage

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[5] Amateur films represent by far the largest type of film in the Scottish Screen Archive, with 3496 out of a catalogue of 17490 titles. Other significant types include: TV News- 2907, sponsored- 2029, documentary- 1979, local topical- 902, newsreel- 525, industrial- 310, drama- 269, fiction-254 and TV entertainment- 56 (information gathered on 9/11/2006).

[6] This system was anticipated by Boleslas Matuszewski in 1898, 'A competent committee will accept or reject the proposed documents according to their historic value' in his 'A New Source of History: The Creation of a Depository For Historical Cinematography', *http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/classics/clasjul/mat.html* (accessed January 28, 2004).

[7] Information from documents provided to the author by the archival staff at Scottish Screen.

of historical interest'. This surprisingly brief document reveals the tough decisions that have to be made about which films it is in the national interest to preserve.[8]

Such policy documents indicate the privileged status visual evidence is deemed to possess in the eyes of the general pubic, and how this justification for the costs of retention is mobilised to legitimate the non-profit institutions that after all, are funded by public money. In this regard, television programmes such as *Scotland on Film* and web-sites such as Scottish Screen's *Archive Live*, perform mediating roles between the public and the national institution responsible for preserving these films. As these television programmes are currently the most consistent users of amateur films preserved within the archive, it is not surprising that evidential functions are prioritised over other criteria, which exert strong influence over future preservation policy. In today's cultural environment, when the general public is increasingly suspicious of the importance of funding non-profit organisations, Scottish Screen's role as the guardian of Scotland's filmic heritage benefits from aligning itself with television programmes of this type. This partly explains the privileged status of non-fiction within the Scottish Screen archive. However, while it makes practical sense to align the archive with these television programmes, such a policy tends to condemn the vast amount of amateur fiction material, precisely the films that would be of most interest to film scholars, to second-class status unless they were entered into the amateur film festival.

As indicated earlier, these developments are now beginning to register within the academy. Journals such as *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* and *Film History* have recently been leading the way in forming dialogues between film archivists and film scholars, within the American cultural context from the late

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[8] The number of amateur films under each category in the Scottish Screen archive is as follows: Grade 1: 598, Grade 2: 373, Grade 3: 657, Unrated: 1868 (Note: this system was introduced in 1998. Films catalogued before 1998 are ungraded).

1990s onwards.[9] Moreover, there have been examples of scholars from the rest of the world engaging with the use of amateur film as visual evidence for television: Jane Simon's recent article 'Recycling Home Movies' being a case in point (2006: 189-199). Her analysis focuses on an Australian television series entitled *Homemade History* (SBS, 2003), which uses amateur film in a similarly evidential function, as the television programmes discussed above. Interestingly, following an outline of what is referred to above as the oppositional and domestic perspectives, she notes that these theoretical frameworks do not fit the films used in the programme, due to the differences between American and Australian amateur film culture. She goes on to write:

> The narratives of *Homemade History* defy generalization into any kind of coherent history. The episodes of *Homemade History* do not represent a cohesive domestic vision of the nuclear family, although a few do contain these elements. The footage includes a diverse range of events, settings, and people (2006: 193).

Simon's observation points towards the fact that amateur filmmakers did not just focus on the domestic environment; they made films on a variety of topics. To illustrate their interviews, the makers of *Homemade History* were somewhat opportunistic in their use of archive film. As long as the footage worked as supplementary material, or provided an interesting visual window into the subject, amateur films made under very different circumstances were freely used. This is evident from the varying formal qualities of the films, as Simon notes:

> The footage of *Homemade History* is sometimes overexposed, scratched, shaky and jumpy. It is also sometimes perfectly exposed, composed and smooth. It offers a pertinent example of how home movies are capable of being both a practice zone of Hollywood style while inflecting the footage with personal and social details (193).

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[9] See especially the issue dedicated to 'Small Gauge and Amateur Film', *Film History*, vol. 15, no. 2 (2003).

The contrasting stylistics of the films to which Simon draws our attention suggests that these programmes do not just focus on home movies. As the title of the programme perhaps implies, they also used films made outside of the domestic environment along with the home movies. This is also the case with both *Nation on Film* and *Scotland on Film*, programmes that draw upon the visual evidence of professional, sponsored or amateur films interchangeably and out of context. For example, in the feature *Scotland on Film- The Movie*, premiered at the 2006 Edinburgh International Film Festival, this lack of concern about the origins of the material was demonstrated in the use of footage from the amateur fiction film *Smart Boy Wanted* (Enrico Cocozza, 1960) to illustrate the sequence on memories of sweet shops in Scotland. The evidential impulse of television producers, therefore does not hesitate to use fictional material when the footage suits its purposes. It should be noted that this example is an exception to the privileged status of non-fiction material as a source of visual evidence, both within these programmes, and within the archive sector.

*Beyond the Home Mode*

The outline of a new framework is perhaps suggested by the limitations of the theoretical models that have been summarised so far. Both the domestic and oppositional perspectives assume that amateur film production is an activity pursued by isolated individuals for a very small audience. The problem is that most amateur filmmakers involved in cine-club production occupied an ambiguous position between public and domestic exhibition strategies; they were not making films for their own private use, nor were they seeking to engage with an avant-garde subculture. These filmmakers are often misinterpreted as those who could not make it into the professional industry: their works existing as records of various attempts at crossover that were never successful. Similarly, reading the outcomes of scholarship on amateur film, as

it exists at the moment, would give the impression that only cultural bohemians or patriarchal fathers ever made amateur films. This was clearly not the case. Richard Chalfen's work, pioneering in many respects, however does not attempt to account for the amateur film movement as a whole, nor does it take account of the meaning and function of amateur film culture. Like Zimmerman his work proceeds via a dichotomy, when he contrasts the 'home mode' with the 'mass mode':

> For instance, feature films (whether shown in movie theatres, on national television, or on home video recorders) are examples of mass modes, whereas home movies and travel film represent the home mode; still photographs published in popular magazines, newspapers, and books exemplify mass modes, whereas snapshots collected in family albums are part of home mode visual communication (1987: 8-9).

These concepts seem initially useful, if somewhat limited in their application. Similarly Zimmermann's economic definition of a mode of filmmaking as 'semi-professional' does not capture this ambiguity, because it implies amateurism is merely a form of pre-professional training, rather than a more autonomous pursuit, centred around the making of films as a hobby. The shortcomings of these two approaches, when confronted with amateur films that do not fit into either category, starts to become more obvious in a footnote to an early article, outlining the principles of the home mode. Chalfen is unsure how to account for this ambivalent film practice:

> We may speculate that when people begin to plan their filmmaking (versus moviemaking) they are leaving the home mode and entering an ''amateur mode.'' Readers should notice that this shift may have nothing to do with camera technology (1975b: 101).

In this brief footnote we see both the value and the limitations of Chalfen's framework. However, home movies are amateur films as well, while this distinction implies that they no longer are. In this regard, the 'amateur mode' as a category proves misleading.

Because the current terminology used to describe cine-club filmmaking seems evasive, I propose a new term: *the restricted mode*. This formulation addresses and acknowledges the limited public exhibition context enjoyed by these filmmakers, without implying that they are simply home moviemakers, or attempting entry into the mass mode. Over the years, filmmakers working within the restricted mode have made many films on many subjects outside the concern of home movies or the avant-garde, which have involved little monetary exchange. Nor is the restricted mode defined by film gauge, and includes work by both lone workers and cine-clubs; it is defined rather by the ambivalent *exhibition space* it occupies between the home and mass modes. Filmmakers working within the restricted mode include those who belonged to film societies and entered their group-made films into the annual film festivals that were held all around the world, as well as more locally-based civic filmmakers who rented town halls and other available spaces to show their films. In an episode of *Nation on Film* (BBC2 2005), over a shot of a programme of the Empire Amateur Film Festival, Elyne Hoskin, of the South West Film and Television Archive notes, 'All of these people are showmen, these amateur filmmakers craved an audience.' Ironically enough the episode was entitled, 'Private Passions'; nevertheless the point is that their films were made not made for just artists or family members, but for a general audience. Yet this was still a *restricted* space, as 16mm film was a format that could not be used in a commercial exhibition space without the expensive transfer to multiple 35mm prints. These factors made it difficult for the amateur sector to become a potential rival for the professional cinema, yet there are isolated examples

of crossovers into the mass mode of commercial theatrical exhibition and television screenings.[10]

As this television programme demonstrates, the gulf between archivist and academic writing on amateur film is revealing of the misconceptions that can accumulate over the years when there is so little dialogue between the two institutional zones. The archivists, coming into day-to-day contact with amateur films that do not fit into either the home or mass modes, are leading the way in this debate. As Laraine Cookson, notes:

> The collective efforts of a well-equipped cine-club may produce a film much closer to accepted 'professional standards' than the shaky, out-of-focus camerawork of many home movies. Although both types of film may be classed as 'amateur' each must be evaluated in different ways (Cookson 1989: 8).

This simple observation is key to the future development of theorising on amateur film. Only by acknowledging the aesthetic differences between the home mode and the restricted mode, and confronting the issues of amateurism, can the debate move forward. Contrary to the recurring invocation of the freedom of the amateur, films made as part of cine-club culture were usually subject to more highly *organised* artistic regimes than home movies. Richard Chalfen and Patricia Zimmermann both note a *divergence* between amateur film journals/manuals and amateur film production. Even a strong critic of these models, James Moran, a video theorist, disputes a correspondence between amateur discourse and actual production. However, this can be explained as the result of his focus on material also produced within the home mode (Moran 2002). By contrast, I want to argue that there was strong *convergence* between discourse and production within the restricted mode. This tendency has been long overlooked by historians/theorists of amateur film.

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[10] See Tony Rose, 'Amateurs Or Blacklegs' *Amateur Cine World*, December 26, 1963, pp. 1006-1009, for more on the issue of amateur films being shown in commercial cinemas.

Cine-club films are part of a film movement, now largely forgotten, that have their own

unique history. As the documentary filmmaker Lance Bird tentatively outlines:

> Cinema clubs are a phenomenon that began in the early 1930's after
> the introduction of 16mm film. They grew steadily in the late
> 1930's; peaked after the war in the late 40's and early '50s; suffered
> a decline in the late '50s; were rejuvenated by the introduction of
> super 8 film in the '60s, and died with the widespread use of VCRs
> in the mid '70s. Some few still exist today (Bird 1986: 39).

These clubs were heavily results-orientated, usually making at least one film a year for the

express purpose of entering this work into amateur film festivals. These exhibition spaces were

subject to the processes of *evaluation* in a way that neither the avant-garde or home movies

ever were, precisely because their audiences consisted of people beyond sympathetic and

indulgent family members.

Guidance on how to keep these audiences entertained was constantly debated in

amateur film journals and manuals throughout the years. What becomes clear from these

sources is that writers within these journals and manuals were themselves heavily involved in

the active creation of an amateur film aesthetic. This amateur aesthetic was both parasitic upon

professional practices *and* innovative towards amateur practices at one and the same time. This

was after all a deeply divided film movement. Broadly speaking, fiction films drew on and

adapted recognisable professional genres such as animation, comedies and action films, while

non-fiction films developed more according to documentary traditions and the unique

conditions of the amateur film sector. The creation of a number of more specific amateur film

genres is illustrative of the important role critical debate had in the formation of practice within

this parallel film culture. The variety of genres that was a given of amateur film culture for

over forty years, provides a stark contrast to the limited number of films that are currently the

focus of academic studies. When these generic practices are established within theorisations of

amateur film, debate will become infinitely richer. Below I offer a number of practical and methodical points to help towards establishing this dialogue.

Research on films made within the restricted mode will mostly have to be pursued through the archive sector. Unlike the avant-garde, which at least has a small but dedicated audience within the mass mode, or the home mode, which is easily available through private sources, work on the restricted mode is not easily available to would-be researchers. While many cine-club films have found their way into storage, the influence of evidential perspectives has meant that these films are not high priority candidates for the production of viewing prints. As we saw, with films used in television programmes regarded as being of higher priority by archive criteria than fiction films, club films often have to wait. Since many films made within the restricted mode were in fact fiction, this effectively means that these films cannot be studied simply because up until this point there has not been a demand for them. Film scholars more actively engaging with archivists in this area would mean that they would have the possibility of influencing these decisions. Without the intervention of film scholars the debate will continue as it is and access to films will continue to be a problem.

Work on amateur film is presently much easier to conduct with reference to non-filmic sources than it is to extend through the viewing of the films themselves. The national press might have been geared more towards the mass mode, but at the height of its popularity, short reports of locally based amateur film festivals often found their way into the pages of the daily newspapers. These reports, often published after the conclusion of the festival are useful for establishing the prize-winning films and filmmakers, as well as finding out what the judges had to say in general about the standards of the entries. However, while reports in national newspapers are useful for researching film festival winners, the most productive research into amateur film can be conducted through the local press. Amateur films do not have to be prizewinners to get extensive coverage within the local newspapers; they just need to be of

local interest to the newspaper's readers. Therefore, far more articles covering amateur films were printed and can be recovered, as long as film scholars are willing to make the trips to local libraries. This point builds on the emphasis put on local film exhibition by previous film historians:

> It is a large and hitherto virtually untapped source of original film historical investigation. Rather than merely sift through the interpretations of others, the local researcher has the opportunity to find and use a great variety of primary materials. Since so little has been done to document film-going at a local level, it is possible to make a contribution to the state of film historical knowledge (Allen and Gomery 1985: 193).

This spirit should inform research into amateur film. However, the key difference between the form of historical investigation advocated by Allen and Gomery, and research into amateur film, is that the research agenda moves from local film exhibition to local film *production.* Amateurs interested in film did not just show films at meetings of their film societies; crucially, they also made their own films. In this way appreciation fed into cultural production, a model example of how people on the ground shaped popular culture to their own particular uses and agendas.

Rather than having to endlessly 'shift through the interpretation of others' as Allen and Gomery put it, the problem for theorising on amateur film, is that there is not a mountain, but a poverty of interpretations. Unlike other areas of film study, amateur film is a hugely *under-theorised* domain. However, some work has emerged in recent years: for example Mark Neumann's 'Home Movies on Freud's Couch' (2002: 24-46), which theorises amateur film from a psychoanalytic perspective. As he notes: 'In this essay, my aim is to explore a critical and interpretative approach to home movies and amateur films that falls outside the boundaries of what might otherwise be considered their historical and archival value' (27). Opportunities exist for a large amount of work to be done in this area, so instead of just focusing entirely on

home movies, or dismissing amateur films that do not provide a radical aesthetic, there is now an opportunity to evaluate amateur films using methods more developed within Film Studies than in neighbouring academic disciplines, in order 'to open up the possibilities of interpretation' (Neumann: 45).

It is clear that debate about the restricted mode could initially focus on the relationship between film journals/manuals and film production. Certain key issues overlap quite naturally with work on professional cinema, such as *authorship* and *genre*. Amateur film made according to the cine club model can provide examples of an authorship that has more in common with the Hollywood studio system than it does with avant-garde film or the home movie. Both individual filmmakers and cine clubs produced films that are much more amenable to the interpretative practices within Film Studies than has been acknowledged up until this point. The *aesthetic* history of amateur film is now waiting to be written. To appreciate these films requires an evaluative approach to films altogether different from that advocated by previous writers. As Noel Carroll notes, 'A great many problems about film evaluation could be resolved, if only we had a way to fix the correct category or categories for evaluating the film in question.' (2000: 268) This is perhaps a productive prescription for theorising on amateur film, as Laraine Cookson realised: to use methods of analysis that are appropriate to the film under scrutiny. The introduction of the term 'the restricted mode' has been suggested with this intention: as an effort to correct the problems inherent in using categories that do not fit the object of analysis. Since the organised activities of cine-clubs are of growing interest to film scholars, work should now begin on the films that they actually made.

# Chapter 2-

## The Amateur Art Cinema:
## From Norman McLaren to Enrico Cocozza

(2:1) Amateur Discourse on Artistry

*The Avant-Garde and British Amateur Culture*

There has always been a lively dialogue between avant-garde filmmakers and amateur filmmakers. The movement between professionals and amateurs has been facilitated by the shared sense of liberation: either culturally or politically. Amateur film societies were seen as the place for cultural practice to develop outside of commercial pressures and institutional practices (Dickinson 1962).

In the United States, such well-respected figures as Maya Deren and Jonas Mekas, became involved with the emerging cultural movement of amateur film (Mekas 1993 & Deren 1959). As well as making their own films on smaller film gauges such as 16mm or 8mm and being a source of inspiration for many, they also wrote articles on amateurism. Here they often emphasised that the amateur had a creative freedom that the professional envied as well as encouraged. In Britain, Ivor Montagu and Ralph Bond took up this task, publishing articles in journals such as *Close-Up*. However, other less-well known writers also became involved in the debate. B. Vivian Braun for example, of the Experimental Film Exchange, wrote an article that directly addresses the convergence of amateurism and avant-gardism. In the 'Amateur Avant Garde' he presents amateur filmmakers with an artistic practice with often minority appeal (1937: 294). He begins in confrontational style:

> This article will, we think, provide an interesting insight into the
> aims and ideas of those who take the sub-standard film somewhat

more seriously than the rest of us, regarding it as a true art form (294).

The investment is clear; avant-garde film is important but amateur filmmakers are charged with not routinely recognising its virtues. They are seen to be wasting their own and everyone else's time by making 'baby on the lawn' films, 'I hope I will be excused if I say that the average subject matter and the average standard of technique in amateur films falls very short of what it could and should be' (294). While the majority of the readers of *Home Movies and Home Talkies* would see filmmaking as a form of leisure activity, he is protesting that they do not work hard enough during this time. The perversity of the argument is clear. Yet Vivian Braun is willing to argue his case:

> Many amateurs reading this may wonder what connection there is between their purely personal films, of holidays, outings, week-ends, friends and families, and the morals and ethics of film as art. There is every connection. No matter what the subject you have no film can be good unless the cinematic principles, the rules of films as a medium of expression, in your cutting, photography, lighting, movement of actors, etc., are as good as possible (294).

Here the avant-gardist sees himself as an advocate of good technique, countering what he sees as the lethargy of amateur film culture. More fundamentally, he wants to bring art to the masses of people who are supposedly misusing their cameras. What he can do, as a specialist in the form, is point out where they are going wrong. To do this he recounts a short parable, in a section of his essay sub-titled 'The Two Methods':

> Suppose two amateurs are to film a train leaving a station. The first shoots fifty or sixty feet of film with his camera nice and straight while the whole train and carriages leave the station. The second, to us an avant-garde worker, shoots first the stationary wheels, then the steam escaping ("impatience"), then a signal up ("tension"), then the wheels moving slowly forward ("release"), then the signal down ("commencement"), then a long-shot of the whole train (to clarify

everything), then the railway lines slowly passing and so on. In other words the second amateur makes a cinematic impression of a train leaving a station. He puts the whole action of a train leaving a station into terms of the cinema (294).

The first of these sequences could be filmed in a minute and shown to family and friends later on the same day. The work of the avant-garde amateur, on the other hand, would most probably take all day to shoot using many different trains as they depart. It could then take a couple of weekends to edit together into a meaningful form. Ironically, to achieve this sophistication of film technique you would have to have a lot of leisure time to devote to the final product. The harder you work professionally, the less time and energy you can devote to amateur activity. Therefore the second amateur would invest more of himself into a leisure activity than he might do in his day job. This conflict is hard to sustain in the long term. Braun acknowledges these problems:

> But, and the question is probably on most reader's lips, why all the bother? Why twenty shots when one would suffice?...*Because film does not rely on the purely realistic reproduction of a scene, but on the representation of a subject through filmic impression* (294).

To find this kind of rhetoric in a journal such as *Home Movies and Home Talkies* is somewhat surprising. Despite the fact that the generally implied readership would most likely strongly disagree with this conception of amateur film, it is a testament to the openness of editorial policy that space for such an article was provided. The very language of this passage is also interesting for its cultural assumptions, echoing as it does much writing on the silent cinema that was being formulated in the Soviet Union, and disseminated in film journals and film society programme notes across Britain in the 1920s and 1930s. It rests on a fundamental conflict between various conceptions of 'culture': whether film is or should aspire to be a means of documenting everyday life or of transcending it altogether. By advocating the latter

discourse, especially in a journal such as *Home Movies and Home Talkies*, he would run the risk of being seen as an 'intellectual'. This is something Braun makes an attempt to disavow: 'These simple principles of film are not for the few highbrow lone workers, they are for all amateurs' (294). Despite this gesture towards egalitarianism, the avant-garde was still of marginal interest in amateur film culture in general. Yet this does not mean that it is without critical and historical importance. In fact, parts of Britain had very strong avant-garde cultures. Outside of London, metropolitan cities distant from the capital were host to a diverse range of amateur film practices.

*The Amateur Avant-Garde and Glasgow*

Glasgow was a particular location where a convergence of very different avant-garde practices emerged out of the dynamic film culture of the 1930s and 1950s. At this point I want to turn the focus of this study of the amateur avant-garde towards two filmmaking groups working in the Glasgow area. Specifically, I will be exploring the two avant-gardes of Glasgow: student filmmaking and surrealism. The Glasgow School of Art Kinecraft Society made a number of notable films during the 1930s, while Supramont Pictures and its later incarnations through the 1950s, specialised in the production of surrealist short films. Both of these groups were influenced by artistic traditions outside of Britain: the Kinecraft Society by 'revolutionary' films from the Soviet Union, and Supramont Pictures by 'art cinema' work from France and Italy. This may cause critical problems, as they do not fit neatly into any British tradition, but a close consideration of their work might go some way to constructing more inclusive, locally based histories of the avant-garde.

'Cartoon films, silhouette films, and puppet films require a terrible amount of patience, but they are splendid subjects for small units. I would like to see these three types of films included as a category in forthcoming national competitions for amateurs. Any amateur who really distinguished himself in this class of work would soon find a lucrative profession for himself in the film business.'

(Brunel 1934: 388)

'The most successful amateur film-maker is someone with a 'bee in his bonnet''

Norman McLaren
(Anon 1963: opening page)

## *Introduction*

Norman McLaren is perhaps the best-known filmmaker in Scotland to make the transition between the amateur and professional worlds of film, and is often used as an example of how the brilliant young student *will* be discovered. The story goes that while watching various films entered into a film festival, John Grierson was enthralled by the experiments of *Colour Cocktail* (1936) when it was projected. He gripped the arm of the man sitting beside him, Forsyth Hardy, and demanded to meet the film's maker. It turned out that its maker was still a student at the time, but not for long. Grierson's patronage and guidance would soon enable McLaren to make a career out of his filmmaking (McBain 1997: 99).[11]

What might be stressed here is that this event happened at the Scottish Amateur Film Festival. Taking place every year at the Cosmo Cinema (now the Glasgow Film Theatre) this event attracted entries from around the world. Scottish filmmaking was particularly well

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[11] Originally quoted in 'An Interview with H. Forsyth Hardy' in McArthur, Colin (ed.) (1982): 84.

represented by individual filmmakers such as Frank Marshall, and cine-clubs like the Meteor Film Society. A filmmaker from the professional industry, such as Michael Powell and Alfred Hitchcock, then judged these films according to various categories. However, this was not a film festival only for filmmakers. The Scottish Amateur Film Festival was also a popular event for film-goers as well, meaning that during its height the festival would play to full houses.

This variant of highly organised amateur activity during the mid-twentieth century has unfortunately not survived into the present day, at least to the same extent. The connotations surrounding amateurism seemed to shift during the late 1960s. From representing the benefits of leisure activity in the 1930s, to being synonymous with inferior results in the late 1960s: not surprisingly the term 'amateur' has now lost its more positive connotations. One of the ways this cultural change has been registered is in the way contemporary film critics and historians approach material that was originally the product of amateur activity.

*A Formalist Perspective on a Canonical Film*

'It is certainly impossible to conceive of the official documentary movement producing such a radical statement as *Hell Unlimited* (1936), Norman McLaren and Helen Biggar's anti-war film made under the auspices of the Glasgow School of Art.'

(Petrie 2000: 102)

As Duncan Petrie acknowledges, the most famous amateur film ever made in Scotland is *Hell Unltd* (1936, 19 mins, b&w/silent). Notoriety however does not preclude writers from referring to it as *Hell Unlimited*, rather than *Hell Unltd*: a small point maybe, but illustrative of misunderstandings that can accumulate over the years. The shortened version, as it appears in the title card at the beginning of the film, relegates the letters 'un' to the lower case, in the following fashion 'HELL unLTD'. This crucial creative decision, often overlooked, is key to

understanding the anti-war sentiments of this film: the actions of the British government can be 'limited' and this 'hell' of a situation can be stopped. The longer version, Hell Unlimited, suggests the exact opposite, a tone of despair when nothing can be changed and these decisions cannot be reversed. This mistake has also been made in another contemporary article which discusses *Hell Unltd*, 'Life on the Margins: The Scottish Avant-Garde Film' by David Morgan (2002: 32-35). The emphasis on seeing this film as avant-garde or political, continues as Petrie notes:

> It also remains one of the most important Scottish contributions to oppositional political film-making in the 1930s of the kind that could only be made beyond the constraints of state-supported film production (200).

Following this quotation, the reader is guided to a footnote that reads, 'For a detailed consideration of oppositional film-making in Britain during the 1930s, see Don MacPherson (ed.) *Traditions of Independence* (London: BFI, 1980)'. Here this film is being incorporated into the canon of avant-garde and independent film.[12] While on the surface there may seem nothing wrong with that, I see this critical turn as shaping a misleading view of the film itself. In contemporary debate, it is more academically acceptable to describe the early films of Norman McLaren as 'avant-garde' or 'independent' productions, rather than using the term 'amateur'. However this re-designation of amateur films has the effect of erasing original production and reception contexts, and turning the films into free-floating, a-historical texts, instead of products of a very specific film culture.[13] A closer look at the production history of *Hell Unltd*, as well as the film itself, should make these points clearer.

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[12] While the edited collection *Traditions of Independence* does in fact have a section on amateur film, and Morgan does refer to McLaren's early films as amateur, the overall argument does not position him within amateur culture as a whole. 'Amateur' is used merely to mean 'non-professional'.

[13] This critical practice can also be explored by reference to the early films of Ken Russell and Peter Watkins. Both *Amelia and the Angel* (1957) and *Diary of an Unknown Soldier* (1959) were well known to amateur filmmakers during the 1950s.[13]

While retrospective critical evaluations of *Hell Unltd* tend to miss the original contexts of both production and exhibition, one way of accessing this forgotten history is through the evidence of newspapers published at the time. On the 8th October 1936, *The Scotsman* (a newspaper that was particularly generous in the space it gave to the amateur film movement in Scotland) publishes a short article entitled:

AMBITIOUS AMATEUR FILM
Glasgow School of Art Group's
Anti-war Production.
(Anon 1936: 8)

This headline is the first time I have seen *Hell Unltd* being described as an amateur film. It also immediately establishes one of the themes I want to explore in this chapter on the amateur art cinema: namely *ambition*. To be an ambitious amateur means to attempt to set yourself apart from the majority of individuals and cine-clubs who are making supposedly more 'modest' films. This artistic attitude is precisely what B. Vivian Braun's, previously discussed article 'Amateur Avant Garde' (to be published one year later in 1937) was describing as the ideal model for the serious amateur. *The Scotsman* film correspondent singles out this standard of value for praise: 'To find an amateur group tackling a serious theme is pleasant and praiseworthy after so many trifling amateur films about a day at the seaside and the village pageant' (8). The critical tendency of serious amateur cinema to position itself against the home movie or the civic film was very much part of the debate within and about amateur culture at the time. A number of other interesting historical points are in evidence in this article. Firstly, this article was written *before* the Scottish Amateur Film Festival, meaning that the group organised a private screening to generate advance publicity in the national press, ahead of the competition itself. This clever marketing strategy, more common in the

professional cinema, demonstrates that the GSA Film Group were as serious about marketing as they were about their filmmaking. Secondly, as you would expect, *Hell Unltd*, is praised for using the freedom of the amateur sector to tackle 'controversial themes...which censorship denies the professional filmmaker' (8). This was essentially still the main attraction of the film for Duncan Petrie, 64 years later. However, this anonymous film correspondent went further than today's critics:

> In the case of "Hell Unlimited," the freedom may have been exploited a little blatantly, and the film scarcely has an adult sense of responsibility; but this useful lack of restraint may be largely forgiven in a film of spirit and substance (8).

This concession may give the impression that this critic is pulling his or her punches. However despite the surface tone of generosity, the critique continues. The critic is especially troubled by the central caricature of the armaments manufacturer. The film indicts him as the representative of capitalism, as the character goes from country to country, persuading political élites of the benefits of a strong national defence system:

> The film tends to simplify both this aspect and the constructive policy put forward: "Write to your M.P., demonstrate, or, if these fail, strike, for a nation cannot fight if things are at a standstill." What is to happen in the event of an attack? (8).

This simple concern, which might have been dismissed at the time, was fully justified by political developments in Germany, Italy and Japan during the 1930s. The politics of pacifism has always held much appeal for students and left-wing organisations through the years and *Hell Unltd* came to be a focal film for these anti-war energies. Distributed by workers film societies, both London and Glasgow Kino, the film often accompanied screenings of Soviet features during what came to be known as the 'Red Decade'. Its relatively short running time

meant that it made a high impact start to the programme, as well as emphasising the local struggles in Britain at the time. Later critics also focused approvingly on its didactic qualities. David Morgan writes, '*Hell Unlimited* (1939) was a radical political statement and a clear expression of McLaren's communist principles.' (2002: 32) The film therefore is seen less as an artistic work and more as a useful weapon in the pursuit of larger struggles. Seen from this dogmatic perspective, the rest of McLaren's career is seen as lacking:

> Despite the strength of *Hell Unlimited's* message, and the important role that politics continued to play in McLaren's life, much of his subsequent film work was nowhere near as overtly political. Only his Oscar-winning 1952 film *Neighbours* was to match *Hell Unlimited* in its outspoken political content (2002: 33).

The focus on political content by film writers often excludes discussion of film style; this analysis of form is strangely lacking even seventy years after the film was completed. Conventionally, like Ivor Montagu's *Peace and Plenty* (1939), *Hell Unltd* is seen as making a radical break with the realist conventions that dominated left filmmaking during the 1930s. As we have seen, there is a strong temptation to simply read this film as an unproblematic example of political filmmaking during an era that strongly supported such causes. However, the following analysis will proceed by asking a more specific question about the film's aesthetics: what is *amateur* about *Hell Unltd*?

Thematically, this film is close in sprit to science-fiction films warning the world of impending doom. Its dystopian vision of the destruction of the masses, through the greed and ignorance of the ruling élites, has more parallels with the fiction of H.G Wells, than it does with socialist realist film-making of the radical left of the time. In its vision of the imminent future, it anticipates the pessimism of nuclear dramas such *On the Beach* (1959) or Peter Watkins's (another former amateur filmmaker) *The War Game* (1965). It is a paranoid vision, one that sees conspiracy, opportunism and deception in the dealings of big business and

governments. The themes are huge, but the budget is small. The passage from initial idea to finished film, and the compromises and pragmatic choices that must be made along the way, are revealing of the position of the amateur filmmaker.

The movement between the modes of animation (still photographs, stock footage, documentary and staged scenes), all add up to what can be described an *opportunistic* aesthetic. The amateur, having little financial resources at hand, must out of necessity make the best of what is immediately available. The extensive use of still photographs, newspaper headlines and war paintings, instead of real life filming, are illustrative of this amateur opportunism. This high impact, quick-cutting style of *Hell Unltd*, never lingers long on any of these visual sources. It suggests that the practice of *pixilation-* a series of still images transformed into a moving image- is a mode of filmmaking to which the amateur is likely to be drawn.

The practice of inserting titles, both at the beginning and end- but also during the film, to represent thoughts and dialogue- was of constant concern to amateur filmmakers. Numerous books and articles were written on the practicalities of how to make your own titles. The filmmakers' attitude towards titling was often indicative of how seriously they approached their productions. While filmmakers such as Frank Marshall and Group 5 made sure their films had titling that is indistinguishable from that of a professional film, other filmmakers found creative means round this persistent problem.

While the titles at the beginning and end of the film impress, and are indistinguishable from that of a sponsored documentary of the time, the use of diegetic titling during other sections of the film is more distinctive. Despite the voluminous literature on titling, the majority of amateur filmmakers favoured a more homemade aesthetic. Rather than following the elaborate and time-consuming processes described in the manuals, they instead choose to design title cards that could then simply be held in front of the camera. These title cards

performed the same function as the more elaborately crafted variety. In the process these diegetic title cards became synonymous with a recognisably distinct amateur film aesthetic. This amateur alternative to a standardised professional practice is fully in evidence in the use of shots of the chalkboard. The easy accessibility of chalkboards within an art school environment is exploited in *Hell Unltd* during the early sequence outlining the historical context of the First World War in 1914. High impact words and phrases are simply written on a blackboard, and inter-cut with two army recruiters, positioned beneath a poster which urges 'Serve Your Country' and later 'Enemy destroyer Sunk'. They address a small enthusiastic crowd: then the lone word, 'WAR' flashes up on screen, followed by 'WAR TO END WAR', then 'DIE', 'TO MAKE THE WORLD SAFE' and finally 'FOR DEMOCRACY', before the film moves on to a series of still photographs of death and destruction. This sequence has the effect of lingering on the power of individual words and phrases, and the subsequent devastating consequences on the battlefields of Europe. The very use of a blackboard and chalk also reinforces the didactic tone that *Hell Unltd* creates from the very outset.

Another quick but telling sequence occurs later on in the film. In line with the *artistic ambition* of the GSA Film Group, this diegetic titling technique is taken a few steps further than the short series of cuts just described. While the single word 'WAR' in that sequence was superimposed over a few frames to create the impression of movement, here this technique is elongated, in a sequence that appears just before the bombing raid scenes. Again, the focus of these animated titles is upon the reverberations of the single word 'WAR'. This time however the word does not just flicker on screen, but is animated so that it appears to move towards the viewer, as a car would move towards a stationary camera positioned in the middle of the road. The effect is created simply by starting with a relatively small version of the word 'WAR', which is varied in each frame to suggest a flickering motion. This is followed by a series of larger-sized letterings in an animated series, until the word quickly dominates the screen and

the letters explode, before regrouping once again as before. The tone is now set for the bombing raids sequence, which is heavily indebted to the creative editing techniques of V.I Pudovkin, whose films would have been shown regularly at arts schools and workers film societies at the time.

The most immediately obvious examples of animation in *Hell Unltd* are the extensive use of the animated thermometer to visualise the changing economic and political climate as the nation moves towards an imagined war. Another visually striking metaphor consists of the armaments dealer in profile. This scene then transforms his head into a giant hand grenade, then finally a giant pound sign: iconic images seen as demonstrating the influence of the passionate anti-war symbolism of Dada, a movement in the international art world ignited by the fall-out from the First World War. These images show great imagination and artistry, and are surely part of the reason that this film remains in the critical consciousness today. However, the subtle use of stop-frame animation in *Hell Unltd* can be overlooked and deserves attention.

Stop-frame animation is used to create the impression of movement in two ways: firstly, to animate graphs and scales, and secondly to bring small handcrafted figures to life. These techniques are integral to the high tempo energy that pulses through *Hell Unltd*, providing a rhythmic quality to what could have been frustratingly static scenes. Just before the animated 'WAR' sequence described above, a scene occurs that shows creative use of the symbolism of measuring scales. It follows themes introduced in a earlier scene representing events at the 1928 disarmament conference in Geneva, as two men squabble over who can have the biggest pile of weapons. The smiling armaments dealer makes sure he intervenes to help each one in turn. This sequence is then paralleled, using stop-frame animation to provide movement to the stationary objects. As the dystopian world becomes a reality, the situation spirals out of control. Piles of coins are transformed into bombs and the scales full of weaponry tip back and forth in constant rivalry, free from all human interference. It is as if individuals

have lost control of world events; the pursuit of power and influence has generated an inevitable historical logic. Objects themselves now make the decisions. Fittingly, the conclusion of this montage sequence sees the scales engulfed by smoke: a symbolic, not literal, representation of an explosion.

As a silent film, *Hell Unltd* pushes its representations beyond the literal to the metaphoric. Notable examples in this regard include the radio sequence where the following words quite literally come out of the announcer's mouth:

> We have been reduced to the absolute limit…
>
> While other countries have been re-arming…

These sentences travel through radio waves and enter the mind of a boy listening at home, in a brilliantly iconic image of the ideological influence of the mass media on unsuspecting young minds. This sequence is inter-cut with stop-motion scenes featuring a small handcrafted figure of a man in a top hat, alternately chopping or watering huge pot plants: suggesting that for businessmen, weapons do not grow on trees, they in fact grow on everyday potted plants. The film also closes with an animated sequence. The collection of figures on the chessboard, a recurring image in the film, band together and form a line to push the bombs off the chessboard. This action brings order back to the world: the weapons disappear off the scales, a young girl smiles, and a staged scene of smiling actors lined up in a similar formation, all parallel the action on the chessboard. The film concludes with the animated figures joining hands and dancing in a circle, an incongruous ending to the most serious of films. As the *Scotsman's* film correspondent notes, 'Whether or not one agrees with its conclusions, one must recognise the film's ingenious construction and persuasive expression.' (8) This content analysis of *Hell Unltd* reveals the deep insecurity the filmmakers had about their political discourse, its symptom being an extensive *over-compensation* in stylistic techniques. This is a

point more than evident in this formal analysis of *Hell Unltd*, but also pertinent to the later study of the films of Enrico Cocozza.

## *Art School Collectives and Creative Conflicts*

The focus of this case study is on how amateur filmmakers used animation as a means of pursuing an artistic amateur practice. Animation by its very definition allows the filmmaker to create images that do not rely on the pro-filmic image. The creativity of the filmmaker's imagination becomes paramount in this process. It also tends to reveal the tensions that exist in educational filmmaking. While students work from an economic situation similar to those of a well-equipped cine-club, they often have aspirations to produce films that can pass as professional products. This predicament becomes part of the initiation into the film industry: filmmakers have to prove their own resourcefulness as amateurs, yet still have a smoothly polished final product. The compromises and opportunism required to make this transition were much in evidence in *Hell Unltd*.

Student filmmaking groups, such as the Glasgow School of Art Kinecraft Society, were a recurrent feature of the amateur film movement from the early 1930s to the late 1950s. Using a combination of 'professional' and 'amateur' film techniques, the GSA Kinecraft Society made a number of live action and animated films. Their live action films, including *Seven Till Five* (1934), which depicts a day in the life of the art school, and *Glasgow May Day* (1937), a documentary record of the annual celebration for the city's workers, tended to be labour intensive. These live action films were then often made as part of a cine-club collective, made up of five students- Norman McLaren, Stewart McAllister, Helen Biggar, Violet Anderson and John Neish- all aided by GSA teacher Willie J. McLean.[14] However, the group's animated

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[14] Information from 'Glasgow School of Art and the Movies', Working Paper, Scottish Screen Archive

films were arguably more artistically successful. This might be for two reasons: firstly, the students were already skilled with the techniques of drawing and painting, so the step towards producing a series of illustrations could be made relatively confidently. Secondly, animation is a time-consuming technique. Within a full time course of study, which provides students with easy access to the necessary equipment, this is not a problem. Due to these factors, amateur animation was an attractive proposition for the artistically ambitious amateur cine-club.

One figure from the amateur film movement who deserves more credit for her achievements in animation, as part of the GSA Kinecraft Society, is Violet Anderson. She was a student in the school from 1929-1933 and an active part of the film group. She helped out on a number of productions: as 'continuity' on Seven Till Five, assisted on Camera Makes Whoopee, and on an unfinished animated short.[15] After leaving the Glasgow School of Art, she went on to teach art for four years, before marrying another member of the Kinecraft Society, John Neish. Following this, her filmmaking continued only as a hobby, her first fully independent project being a travel film on pre-war Austria, entitled Heil Osterreich (c1937). It is an important amateur film, which was entered in the novice class of the 1938 Scottish Amateur Film Festival, as the Scottish Screen working paper notes: 'It is one of only a small number of entries to the pre-war Scottish Amateur Film Festivals to have survived, and it is one of even fewer to have been made by a woman'. As this survey of artistic amateur animation in Scotland continues, it is interesting that female filmmakers have distinguished themselves so well in the field of amateur animation.

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[15] Other animated shorts completed as part of the art school film group include Ask No Questions (c1936) and Jungle Jinks (1940).

*Heil Osterreich* was not an isolated example of an amateur film made by a Scottish woman. At least two other major filmmakers who used animation to great effect were Jean Grey and Margaret Tait, both of whom were based in Edinburgh for lengthy parts of their filmmaking lives. These two individuals managed to realise on film some of the freedoms offered by animation, despite being outside of the benevolent art school environment. The films made by these two figures, provide excellent examples of how to view their animated films as *amateur* cinema, rather than merely absorbing them into the already existing canons of avant-garde or independent film.

A key distinction lies in the difference between the animated films produced by a cine-club and the kind of animated films produced by a lone worker. Cine-clubs like the GSA Kinecraft Society, made animated films that were technically complex, and required a large division of labour. Lone worker animated films by contrast tended to work from a basic technical set-up and make the most of what was available. The latter were consequently more modest productions. A film such as *Witch Craft* (1938, 4 mins, colour/silent) is a good case in point. On the border between a live action and animated film, *Witch Craft* impresses precisely due to its ambituous use of everyday objects to create a mesmerising series of images. In its abstract use of colour (especially red, which dominates) and light, it anticipates the animated experiments of the professional Norman McLaren. Using a collection of dolls, but viewing them through the prisms of mirrors and glass bowls, Jean Grey manages to make innocent childhood objects seem sinister and strange. The viewer struggles to work out what the original objects behind the glass are, being rewarded when the objects emerge as European as well as Chinese dolls, along with small model elephants. These arrangements are interrupted by even more abstract shots of coloured water being poured into the top of the container, and slowly

engulfing the remaining clear water. During these events the camera is fixed and unmoving: resembling the scientific gaze examining an intricate industrial process. The title itself, *Witch Craft*, could be alluding to the powers of illusionism of the female artist.

This simple, yet effective short film, as the title card announces, was the 'PRIZEWINNER at the British Empire Amateur Film Festival, Glasgow, 1938.' By proudly displaying this title card at the beginning of the film, the filmmaker very much saw herself as part of the amateur film scene, in complete contrast to the GSA Kinecraft Society and last Scottish filmmaker I will discuss, Margaret Tait.[16] As Janet McBain and Alan Russell suggest:

> Reprising perhaps the experimental work of Norman McLaren at Glasgow School of Art in the 1930s with hand painting on to film stock and mixing live action with animation, her experimental work and highly visual film poems are far removed from the main body of production in Scotland. They have an international critical standing that few Scottish film makers in history have achieved (2004: 102-03).

Amateur innovations in Glasgow during the 1930s arguably had an effect on another amateur film artist nearly twenty years late, working in an altogether different context. Her animated films, such as *Calypso* (1955, 4 mins, colour/sound), *John Macfadyen (The Stripes in the Tartan)* (1970, 3.30 mins, colour/sound), *Painted Eightsome* (1970, 7 mins, colour/sound) and passages of *Colour Poems* (1974, 12 mins, colour/sound) illustrate the altogether different possibilities of lone worker animation. While Tait never integrated herself into the active amateur filmmaking scene in either Edinburgh or Orkney, an amateur aesthetic marks her animated films. She would draw directly onto 35mm film she had left over from making her documentaries, as well as 'second-hand' stock that she acquired, which had an already existing soundtrack. Margaret Tait displayed an amateur opportunism, when in 1952 as a student in

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[16] I have considered the case for Margaret Tait being seen as an amateur artist in 'A Review of *Subjects and Sequences: A Margaret Tait Reader*' in *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 7, 1 (forthcoming).

Rome at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, she 'was given a surplus piece of 35 mm soundtrack with calypso music on it by a technical officer at the office of the British Information Service in Rome' (106). By painting onto the film with a brush and colour dyes, she creates accompanying visual images to the musical track, which when projected together, as *Calypso*, can never again be separated in the mind. The movement of the music has a corresponding and synchronous visual movement that is brought to life by careful use of line and colour. Animation such as this allowed her complete control over the artistry of the finished film. These practices tended to be the preferred medium for students who would rather work on their own than as part of a large and potentially clumsy decision-making process. In this way, students pursuing animation enjoyed unprecedented creative control for filmmakers at the beginning of their careers. This model corresponds closely to what the amateur film journals described as the *lone worker* method of amateur filmmaking: a position dominant within the sphere of home mode, but less common in the restricted mode.

## *Conclusion*

This case study has attempted to demonstrate why it is preferable to rescue the term 'amateur' from critical neglect. The re-classification of amateur films as examples of the avant-garde or the independent traditions has encouraged misleading accounts of Scottish film history to flourish. Amateurs drew on a variety of mainstream filmmaking practices and appropriated them for their own purposes, as well as developing a number of filmic techniques more specific to the amateur sector. On this evidence, amateur filmmakers imitated as much as they rejected professional standards, implying that terms such as 'independent' suggest a misleading *separatism* of the amateur film movement, which might be corrected in light of the empirical evidence at hand.

As we have seen from this survey of animation, there were a variety of solutions to the problem of how to make 'artistic' moving images in the amateur sector of filmmaking. While the Glasgow School of Art Kinecraft Society chose to make films within the cine-club model of film practice, lone workers such as Jean Grey and Margaret Tait made films that took advantage of the personal freedom enjoyed by filmmakers outside of the collective decision-making process. Being simultaneously attuned to these factors of production, exhibition and criticism, is key to understanding the amateur film movement, and is an approach that will continue to inform this thesis as a whole.

## (2:3) At the Edge of the Amateur Sector: The Films of Enrico Cocozza

"Film will only become an art when its materials are as inexpensive
as pencil and paper."

Jean Cocteau

'To my mind, the production of ugly monstrosities in the name of the
*avant-garde* (whatever that might be), and the attempt to justify
meaningless rubbish by calling it "highly personal," are as far from
the kind of filmmaking that matters as the suburban pre-occupations
of nine-tenths of British amateurs…Of course, it takes more skill and
just as much energy, to do the small clear thing, than to try to be an
imitation Cocteau or a poor man's Orson Welles.'

(Smith 1959: 1123)

### *Introduction*

As the above quotation from Jack Smith suggests, in late 1950s there was real concern that some filmmakers were being a distracted from the true calling of the amateur. These young men who were trying to make profound artistic statements, just ended up making empty copies

of works by the masters. Indeed, Scotland had its own 'imitation Cocteau': a young man by the name of Enrico Cocozza. This case study will consider the films of one individual working within the amateur film sector in Scotland during the 1950s. Its aim is to establish not just the significance of his particular body of work, but to deploy the material as heuristic device, establishing in that process a series of questions concerning the possibility (and/or desirability) of an amateur art cinema.

Enrico Cocozza (1921-1997) was one of Scotland's most innovative amateur filmmakers. A university lecturer by profession[17], at weekends he pursued a career making films. Like Norman McLaren, he was an aspiring professional: entering his provocative shorts into the Scottish Amateur Film Festival, in order to gain attention for future projects, what Robert Stebbins terms 'a pre-professional devotee...who intends to join the professional ranks' (1977: 594-95). He was involved in the amateur filmmaking scene as a preparatory exercise, regarding amateur work as a stepping-stone, or temporary environment in which to gain recognition and notoriety, before moving into professionalism. Ronnie McClusky, former director of the Scottish Film Council, described his work as "abstract, experimental and often superior to the work of professionals" (Davidson 1978). He won many prizes but his work was often controversial.

Cocozza's best work represents a number of things that may seem 'alien' to films produced in the amateur sector: ambition, theatricality and the unconscious. Excess marks both the output and the activity: he was a prolific filmmaker. During a thirty year career he made over thirty films, wrote numerous articles and produced a full-length novel.[18] He set up his own film society, built his own cinema, formed his own production unit and made a 'professional' documentary for Films of Scotland. Despite the struggles toward the end of his life, his artistic output was nothing less than fascinating and his successes deserve to be remembered.

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[17] First in the modern languages department at the University of Glasgow, then later at the University of Strathclyde.
[18] *Assunta: The Story of Mrs Joe* (New York: Vantage Press, 1987). This novel is based on his mother's experiences growing up in rural Italy and her subsequent move to Glasgow.

The influence of Jean Cocteau needs to be noted at the outset as it casts a long shadow over the methods and frameworks for thinking about Cocozza's filmic contribution. Most of Cocozza's fantasy films evidence links with techniques and themes associated with Cocteau. Indeed Cocozza's first fantasy film, which was made in Italy, *La Morte et le Poête* (1943), alludes directly to Cocteau's debut *Le Sang d'un Poête* (1930), so it is not surprising to learn that this feature was shown and discussed at The Wishaw Film Society that Cocozza helped set up. *La Belle et la Bête* (1946) and *Orphée* (1949) were also featured among the society's regular screenings of English language classics and European art films. Later on in his life Cocozza wrote a PhD thesis on the films of Jean Cocteau, which testifies to his long-term interest in his contribution to the history of French cinema.[19]

The central question that I will explore in this chapter is: what is the relationship between surrealism and narrative in these fantasy films? An inherent tension between the surrealist's love of the visual and suspicion of the organising principles of narrative appears much in evidence here. Instinctively opposed to an excessive rationalisation, and finding an aesthetic correlative in the narrivisation of what they as properly random and unconnected events, Surrealism seeks alternative principles of aesthetic organisation (Grant 2005). Despite the surrealist's many criticisms of Jean Cocteau, reference to the artist's work is useful in this regard. In a study of Jean Cocteau for example, Arthur B. Evans uses the tile 'Narrative versus Poetic Film' for his first chapter (Evans 1977). A similar tension, suitably modified by the ideologies of amateurism, exists in Cocozza's films, which is a topic that will have further exploration. Three separate movements might therefore be sketched to Enrico Cocozza's career, which point towards tensions within the amateur filmmaking community and its attitude to 'artistry'. Initially, attention might usefully be given to the fantasy films made for the Scottish Amateur Film Festival (S.A.F.F).

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[19] 'The Poetic Imagery and Existential Dilemma of Jean Cocteau', awarded by the University of Strathclyde, 1979.

As an aspiring professional filmmaker Enrico Cocozza made numerous semi-surrealist works for exhibition in the S.A.F.F, conceived very much as 'calling cards', hopefully easing his movement into the professional sector. They attempt to reconcile a surrealist aesthetic with narrative accessibility. Whilst surrealist purists may call this a compromised version of a movement that prides itself on its radicalism, these contradictions become fascinating as they are played out in the films themselves.

The two films initially demarcating this category of 'narrative based surrealism' are *Fantasmagoria* (1948) and *The White Lady* (1949). From a narrative and thematic point of view each explores similar terrain; both filmed on the Coltness Estate in Wishaw. To shoot on private property, Cocozza had to ask the permission of Col. The Hon. R.A.B. Hamilton, The Master of Belhaven. Cocozza later recorded that the Master of Belhaven's reaction to seeing the finished products was somewhat extreme: 'When the Coltness owner saw the film he told me never to set foot on his property again.' (Davidson 1978) While these films tended to be critically acclaimed, general audiences were often similarly hostile. This might have been difficult to reconcile; clearly however Cocozza gained mischievous enjoyment from scandalising the patrons of the Cosmo (an art-house cinema now known as the Glasgow Film Theatre), whilst establishing his surrealist credentials. After all, this would have been part of the surrealist calling: to shake up and reawaken perception of the unconscious in complacent spectators. He was merely following the prescriptions of the movement's manifesto in this respect.

Both films follow a similar narrative pattern: a young man enters a country park surrounded by trees, either alone or in the company of a young woman. What initially looks

like a nice day out in natural surroundings quickly turns into nightmare of paranoia, seduction and betrayal. *Fantasmagoria* (1948, co-directed with James Thompson, 42 mins, b&w/sound) is notable not only for its passion-filled orchestral score, but also for its simple storyline in which the young woman (Edith Kay) is seduced by The Evil One (Enrico Cocozza) while her boyfriend (George Cuthbertson) is away picking flowers for her. Under The Evil One's influence, the bond of trust between them is broken. After a final kiss, the young man looks at his partner in a wholly new light. He realises that she is now under the influence of the Evil One. The implication is that no one is safe. Your loved ones could turn on you at any minute if you are not vigilant. Somewhat surprisingly, given the tone of the rest of the film, *Fantasmogoria* has a happy ending: the couple manage to escape The Evil One and the nightmare ends. As the *Wishaw Press* had it, 'it depicts the triumph of love over pure evil' (Anon 1948b), a fairly conventional reaction to a film that is anything but conventional.

Critical reviews of the film, which can be found in festival reports that ran in local and national newspapers, struggled for comparisons from the professional sector. According to Robin Millar, Cocozza 'uses methods seen in some early German freak films' (Millar 1948). Forsyth Hardy, writing in *The Scotsman* wrote, 'As I watched the film, I was reminded at one moment of Jean Cocteau, at another of Carl Dreyer's eerie fantasy, "*Vampyr*"' (Hardy 1948). Gordon Irving reported that the adjudicator of the festival, Stephan Watts, then film critic on the London-based *Sunday Express*, had commented, '"It is the problem picture of the Festival," said Mr Watts. "I congratulate the director on his courage in making it. It shows great imagination- undisciplined imagination."' (Irving 1948) This remark apparently summed up the feelings of the packed Cosmo crowd: 'This description of it by adjudicator Stephen Watts was applauded by the audience who, with him, had admired its courage, but failed to follow its fantasy all the way, and sometimes had an indulgent laugh for Mr Cocozza's over-high ambitions' (Crichton 1948). Perhaps more practical issues were at stake. Most of the fifty-

seven entries ran four minutes or less, while *Fantasmagoria* lasted just under forty minutes, a

length that his fellow filmmakers seemed to resent. Robin Millar confirmed this, 'At times a

critical audience chuckled, for the film was run through too fast. It needs cutting' (1948).

Reading this response is difficult at second hand; it may be that this was not the laughter of

derision, but that the audience were genuinely surprised by what they were seeing on screen.

After all, fantasy films can provide a space for the unexpected. More suggestively, the judge

went on to relate the film's operation to specifically amateur concerns:

> He detected a fear of simplicity, that fear which haunted all
> amateurs. He felt the maker was running away from simplicity and
> was so determined to be obscure or difficult that he became a little
> self-conscious with worry.[20]

However, Cocozza's work gained genuine support from other critics, in particular Forsyth

Hardy, who was one of the first people to recognise something of value in Cocozza's work:

> I do not pretend that I fully understood the film; and there were
> many in the audience who remained unpersuaded, if not frankly
> puzzled, by it. But here was the kind of courage which often goes
> with genius. A director with fresh and original ideas had decided to
> cut clean away from Hollywood imitation and drab documentary
> (1948).

Making fantasy films, especially ones eschewing the usual modesty and self-restraint expected

in amateur productions, ensured that Cocozza would be located on the margins of the

movement. In fact, in keeping with his surrealist antecedents, he seems to have revelled in

being misunderstood. This can be seen in the ways in which *Fantasmagoria's* old man with a

long white beard was generally interpreted. Two critics have written that they saw the figure as

'representing the devil': from this perspective, the story is thematised as that of a young couple

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[20] Judge's comments in the paper archives of Scottish Screen.

resisting the evils of temptation. Stephen Watts however was less sure: 'Mr Watts remarked that the old man in the film mystified him. He could have been Sir Lawrence Olivier playing "King Lear" or he might have been Pettigrew and Stephens' Santa Claus!' (Anon 1948b). The manifest humour involved in dressing up in outlandish costumes and wearing an obviously false beard, seems to have been lost on this overly sober crowd. While a measure of scepticism towards the framework of 'auteurism' (which newspaper reports such as these tend to work within) is probably appropriate in this context, Cocozza's own account of the film is revealing of the thinking behind his amateur-orientated practice. In a subsequent interview,

> Mr Cocozza, who welcomed all the criticism, told *The Wishaw Press* that the "old man" was meant to represent the medieval conception of Christian ideals and the reason why he was shown with a false beard was because he was being seen through the eyes of a young man who, belonging to this modern era, looked upon the medieval Christian ideas as being essentially false (Anon 1948b).

In this mischievous quote, Cocozza's inheritance of surrealist principles, their links to anti-clericalism and an atheistic stance are quite apparent. Despite this controversy, *Fantasmagorria* went on to win the Andrew Buchanan Cup for the Best Scottish Film- any class- and the Glasgow Film Society Prize at the 1949 S.A.F.F.

In his report of the festival published in *The Scotsman*, Forsyth Hardy was extremely encouraging of Cocozza's filmmaking efforts. He continued:

> Enrico Cocozza, chiefly responsible for the conception and execution of this 40 minute film, is clearly a man capable of thinking and feeling in cinema terms. He will make simpler and better films than "*Fantasmogoria*," and he should feel no resentment over the laughter which it occasionally provoked from the Cosmo audience. He should remember that it is a little startling to find a surrealist orchid among the film daisies and buttercups. He gave the Festival its most stimulating moments (Hardy 1948).

In short, what is found here is a fantasy film with surreal moments, rather than a surrealist film *per se*. The divide between the reaction of the general audience and the critics to this contained surrealism was wide, and subsequent films did not narrow this chasm.

A year later, Cocozza had clearly learned some lessons from the unsympathetic audience response. This time he chose to direct the film by himself: although the scenario was based on a ghost story by Sir Walter Scott, which was suggested to him by William Martin (Anon 1949a). Thus although clearly growing in confidence after the success of *Fantasmagoria*, Cocozza still relied on a small group of local collaborators to help on the production. Never what amateur film journals confidently referred to as a 'lone worker', Cocozza again functioned as part of a team on what was called 'A Supramont Picture'. At one level, the aspiration to work within professional models of production is clear; at another, resources remain distinctly amateur: William Martin according to local press reports had 'recently retired from the managership of the Direct Labour Department for Housing at Bartonhall, Waterloo' (Anon 1949a). A background in the arts is not necessary to work on a Cocozza film, whose direction would draw on local 'talent' not just for starring roles in front of the camera, but also for general assistance with production. While *Fastasmagoria* ran to almost forty minutes, *The White Lady* (1949, 13 mins, b&w/sound) lasted a mere thirteen. Perhaps Cocozza hoped that the shorter running length would be more acceptable to the SAFF audience?

The film once again starred George Cuthbertson, this time as a lone hiker who finds himself caught up in a nightmare during a ramble through the Wishaw Estate. As he walks down a quiet country road, a mysterious voice whispers to him to 'come closer' (Supramont had now incorporated sound techniques into their amateur film aesthetic, something that would distinguish their work from most of the other productions being exhibited at the S.A.F.F). The hiker then comes upon an isolated cottage. He knocks but there is no answer. Suddenly an off-

screen figure pushes him into the doorway, and the voice of a 'White Lady' (provided by Sheila Stodart) enjoins him to 'come in and rest awhile'. A little later this mysterious figure leads him by the hand into the forest. She takes him to a clearing where a grave-digger (Roderick Ravenscraig) is making preparations for a burial. The hiker is told to 'look into the grave'. Following a loud scream, and a shot of the setting sun, we see the backpacker being covered with earth. 'Come to the door' the White Lady again entices us, as we see shots of an empty sky.

In style and theme *The White Lady* is very similar to Cocozza's SAFF entry the previous year. A sense of 'correction' is apparent, with the filmmaker remaking the same genre of film, but only this time with greater modesty and a firmer concession to the audience. He might have reasoned that this would bring him acclaim from both festival-goers and judges. In this he would be mistaken. The adjudicator Alexander Mackendrick, who that year directed *Whisky Galore*, described it as "not everyone's cup of tea", but went on to say that "the man who made it is obviously trying very high. He is breaking fresh ground" (1949a). In his now annual review in *The Scotsman*, under the heading 'Amateur Has Lessons to Teach the Studios', Forsyth Hardy once again wrote like a fan, albeit one who this year was slightly disappointed:

> This is an exciting fantasy with a decidedly eerie flavour, directed with near-professional skill and most sensitively photographed in colour. I thought, however, that it echoed too obviously some of the elements in "Phantasmoria" (sic). The director must find some less elusive form for the expression of his undoubted feeling for the cinema. Virtuosity alone is not enough (Hardy 1949).

This criticism must have hit Cocozza hard (he cut the article out for his scrapbook). Nonetheless *The White Lady* won the fiction category, and was presented with the Alfred Hitchcock Cup and the British Film Institute Prize of £10. He also won along the Lizars Cup

(named after the camera retail chain) for a more conventional film in the personal record section, *Ric Has a Bath,* where two boys try to bathe an Alsatian. Alexander Mackedrick might have said that "He knows quite a lot about filmmaking", but he would clearly have to rethink his filmmaking strategy if he was going to move up the ranks towards the professional sector. The consensus view was that his talent was undeniable, but that his choice of topic left much to be desired. Murder and lurid (yet fun) explorations of the nature of evil did not go down well, with people being encouraged to pursue more respectable forms of film practice.

Over the next couple of years Enrico Cocozza experimented with various film genres including social realism, parodies of Hollywood biblical epics, even science-fiction. The search for this 'less elusive form' shaped the next few years, and a range of forays into amateur production.

## *The Push Towards Reality*

It is somewhat ironic that Enrico Cocozza's most celebrated films in his own lifetime were also his most conventional. Amateur film culture has long favoured non-fiction over fiction. This has many reasons, the primary ones being the ease of finding subjects in everyday life, and the impulse to capture the present for later reminiscence. Professional filmmakers acknowledged this and therefore understood why Cocozza's work was valuable:

> For example, Mackendrick suggested- rightly, I think- that while some years ago the chief contribution made by the amateur to professional film-making had been the documentary idea, the greater use of realism, to-day the amateur was demonstrating the capacity of the film for fantasy (Hardy 1949).

Whilst he was being celebrated for his difference and uniqueness therefore, like most amateur filmmakers, Cocozza also used his 16mm camera to document the world as he found and

experienced it. Many home movies and travel films exist in the archive that were made at the

same time as his creative energies were focused on his fantasy work. These include the family

film *Bryan Welcomes Raffles* (1943) and the two versions of *Alassio* (1947 and 1954),

impressively shot films of a holiday to the small Italian fishing village. Cocozza also made

various films of local life in his hometown of Wishaw including *Scenes at West Cross* (1949).

However it was one non-fiction film in particular that impressed Harold Benson, writing in a

new amateur film journal *Amateur Movie Maker*. *Sail to Inveraray* (1952, 14 mins,

colour/sound), a film detailing a steamer trip from Wemyss Bay through the Kyles of Bute to

Inveraray, was entered in the S.A.F.F in 1956. The language used in its defence is revealing:

> In honest, orthodox style, it covers a crowded boat trip. Cocozza
> regards it as a very minor work, and so it is, but in my opinion it is
> one of the best things he has done.
> Why? My guess is that this is a production where he didn't feel any
> necessity to strain after effect. The accompaniment is a simple music
> background of Scottish airs, without any commentary. The visuals
> are direct and simple (though as with almost all his films there's an
> odd reluctance to get in really close). And the result is immediately
> attractive. (1959: 292)

This film is 'honest', 'orthodox', 'minor', 'simple', 'direct' and 'attractive'; attributes valued

generally in amateur film culture. An implicit opposition is being set up between these qualities

and those of earlier fantasy productions, which in comparison are seen by implication as

'dishonest', 'unique', 'major', 'complex', 'elusive' and 'unattractive'. Once again it seems that

amateur film discourse is coming into conflict with the perceived 'excesses' of other artistic

traditions, endorsing a 'return' to the spirit of true amateurism:

> It's not often one feels like encouraging an amateur to abandon his
> more personal experiments for the sake of comparative orthodoxy.
> But it's my belief that Cocozza is at his best when he is not really
> trying and when he comes out of his private world into everyday
> surroundings (Benson 1959: 292).

Certainly an ambitious man, it is entirely possible that Cocozza took this advice to heart, in order to further his career. Soon after he went on to direct the professional documentary *Glasgow's Docklands* (1956) for the Films of Scotland committee. Four years later he made *Meet the Stars* (1960), a film featuring Scottish football stars sponsored by the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society. With money to be made in this kind of film activity, and the relative difficulty of entering professional filmmaking, it is perhaps not surprising that Cocozza should seem prepared to abandon his more 'personal' ambitions.

An attempt to reconcile these two conflicting traditions had already been attempted at an earlier stage of Cocozza's career. *Chick's Day* (1949-50) combines fiction filmmaking with the social-realist impulse that dominates critical writing on British film culture. This consensus about the primacy of social realism can be seen in Mitch Miller's 2002 article in *The Drouth* on Enrico Cocozza, which uses *Chick's Day* to reinvigorate interest in his work, skimming over the fantasy films (Miller 2002). *Chick's Day* was also seen as an important film even before it was made, as an article titled 'Wishaw Amateur to Attempt Film on Juvenile Crime' announcing its production in *The Cinema: News and Property Gazette* indicates. The article reports, 'A Wishaw amateur cinematographer is to make a film on juvenile delinquency which, he hopes, will be used by local authorities and other bodies' (Anon 1950). Implying a 'crossover' between fiction filmmaking and instructional film, a strategy more common in the amateur sector using non-fiction methods (something that will be explored in chapter four of this thesis), the reports gives little clue to the character of the film in its finished form. It is the story of a day in the life of young Wishaw man who is driven to commit crime because of desperate social circumstances, that recalls as much as anything the Warner Bros. social problem films of the 1930s starring James Cagney. The implication behind the film is clearly that if 'circumstances' were improved, Chick would not find himself in this situation, making a

social constructionism that would appeal to the civic authorities that would notionally find use for this film. Not everyone greeted this new sense of compromise with enthusiasm. Mamie Crichton warned:

> He is going to switch from his preoccupation with the fantastic and the supernatural to make a realistic film about juvenile delinquency. He will probably do it well, but I was rather sorry to hear of his plan. There have been so many commercial films on the subject and I do so heartily agree with Adjudicator Sandy Mackendrick, who emphasised the enviable position of the amateur as an artist finding self-expression to himself, in being free of the commercial and censorship consideration which apply to the professional (Crichton 1949).

The making of *Chick's Day* shows that Enrico Cocozza was far from content with his designation as 'an amateur'; he aspired to make films 'like' the professionals, not only at the level of technique, but also in terms of content. He did not always value the supposed 'freedom' of the amateur sector, and *Chick's Day* was his way of branching out of it. In this sense, the film was remarkably successful, winning the Ten Best annual competition held in the National Film Theatre in London. Cocozza was subsequently invited to write an article on the making of the film for *Amateur Cine World*, even though the journal's editor, Tony Rose, later admitted that he found it both 'pretentious and long-winded' (1959: 76). The British filmmaking establishment finally accepted Enrico Cocozza on its own terms, not his.

*Chick's Day* offers a version of surrealism that attempts to combine new perspectives conjured through surrealistic devices, with a paternal notion of civic responsibility and national unity, still powerfully inscribed in the aftermath of the Second World War. So although an impressive achievement for an amateur filmmaker, his most successful work is also the most assimilable in terms of British film as a whole. It was only when Cocozza added a first-person voiceover a few years later that *Chick's Day* took on a fresh dimension and became more historically important. This non-synchronous soundtrack, altogether more characteristic of

work in the amateur sector, describes Chick's feelings and motivations in a strong Wishaw accent. At the same time, this device increases its 'localness' and preserves accents and slang that might have been otherwise lost or forgotten. This demonstrates that like their professional equivalents, amateur films can circulate in multiple versions. The personal and confessional nature of the voiceover changes the impact of the film and saves it from comparison with his fantasy films.

*'Direct' Surrealism*

Ten years after producing *The White Lady* Enrico Cocozza returned to the Wishaw Estate to film *The Living Ghost* (1959), marking a return to old themes and methods, many years after they were first abandoned. Significantly, at a time when colour processes were more available to the amateur filmmaker, this film was made in black and white, perhaps for budgetary reasons. 'It was shot in Glasgow, Edinburgh, St Andrews and Crail harbour and took about three months to complete' recorded *The Wishaw Press*. The opening credits announce, 'A film by Enrico Cocozza'; with the filmmaker again selling himself as an auteur. Returning to old locations and reprising old themes, *The Living Ghost* exhibits a more pronounced poetic edge than hitherto. An elaborate internal monologue is added, expressing the lead character's (Billy Stewart) male existential angst, which was devised by Chris Clemant and Cocozza, adapted from poems by Rainer Maria Rilke and Cathy Rain. Clemant and Cocozza double as narrators for extra artistic expression.

While technically *The Living Ghost* is much more competent than both *Fantasmagoria* and *The White Lady*, sadly, there is a sense here of diminishing returns on these investments. Cinematography, camerawork, music and commentary are impressive, yet the content disappoints; it features a young man filled with dread about a relationship with a woman and

their child lost in the forest. The narrative is however altogether abstract in terms of story development, whilst its apparent misogyny leaves a bitter taste.[21] *The Living Ghost* can then be seen as an existential version of the angry young man films that were popular in Britain at the time. A newspaper report claimed it was about 'the frustration of young people today' (Anon 1959), but it seem more like being about the frustration of a young man and his resentment towards family responsibility. A report from the S.A.F.F published in *Amateur Cine World* says, 'Many people in the audience at the Cosmo cinema in Glasgow and at Edinburgh disliked it intensely because of its melancholy, macabre character. Some may be weary of the theme of mixed-upness and aimless frustration.' (Anon 1961: 42) It was critically successful however, taking the premiere award, the Victor Saville trophy.

More interesting is Cocozza's overtly surrealist filmmaking in *Masquerade* (1954, 12 mins, b&w/sound). This is film as clever flirtatious performance. Dance, editing and music are combined to offer the spectator an alternative to the narrative-based fantasy that formed the early part of Cocozza's career. For over sixteen and a half minutes, complex ideas about sexual attraction are explored through a young female character (Margo Petrie) as she searches for her boyfriend in a parallel dimension. During the course of the film the young woman dances her way through a journey which brings her into the paths of five different male 'types'; a sailor, a boxer, a cyclist, a bookworm and a businessman. She dances around each man in turn, teases him and watches his reaction to her provocations. In fact, *Masquerade* could be read as a film that recycles the Orpheus myth that Cocteau used in his 1949 film *Orphée*, as an individual travels to the underworld to rescue their partner. Only this time the gender roles are reversed, as it's the woman who goes looking for her boyfriend.

The dance sequences are performed and filmed with much confidence and skill. During certain scenes the reverse-motion is introduced so that Miss Petrie dances backward through

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[21] The representation of woman in some Cocozza films has been a subject of debate in Mitchell Miller's article and is a topic that deserves further exploration.

the corridors. But the most impressive thing about *Masquerade* its sustained ambiguity. The film it begins with a young dancer moving with a mask around a room. Then she proceeds to cut various ribbons, before removing a mask from a man who disappears when she kisses him. After some symbolic fireworks, the sailor in a mask offers her a key, which he then proceeds to put in his jacket. He falls over after she removes his mask, and they kiss in a highly stylised manner as she dances away with the key. The film ends when she re-enters the room seen in the opening scenes and she is reunited with her boyfriend. Cocozza's imagery seems to beg for Freudian analysis, of the type proposed by Mark Neumann. As he points out:

> Perhaps the nature of consciously constructed narratives is an obvious place to look for dreamlike fantasies being played with and played out. Like the commercial films of Hollywood-which we often refer to as the "Dream Factory"- these amateur scenarios are clearly created to tell a fantasy story (2002: 38).

In fantasy stories such as *Masquerade*, surrealist devices dominate, blurring distinctions between the real and the dream worlds with only these kind of interpretative practices to guide you. Indeed this is part of the pleasure of this genre of filmmaking. In earlier films such *Fantasmagoria*, the two were kept very separate. In a bracketing device recalling *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), we discover that all of the fantasy characters have their real life counterparts. So we see Enrico Cocozza walk over a bridge past the camera in his everyday clothes. No such reassurance marks *Masquerade*, suggesting there are two kinds of surrealism at work in Cocozza's oeuvre; one narrative based with rational explanations, and another performance based with an investment in the irrational.

Certainly there is a sense of freedom about this film, which continued in one form or another in films produced over the next few years. But if Enrico Cocozza was going to continue pursuing this kind of filmmaking, he would have to do it outside the mainstream of the amateur film circuit. Films such as *Petrol* (1957) a two minute black and white film about a

roadside murder, but more especially *Bongo Erotico* (1959, 11 mins, b&w/silent) which is less of an amateur film and more of an 'underground' production are especially suggestive (Cook 1966). They were credited as the work of 'CBC' and 'Tic' films respectively. *Bongo Erotico* seems not to have been shown in competition, or in any mainstream exhibition environment. This film, along with *Petrol*, was made more as a private experiment during the years when Cocozza was mainly employed as a professional filmmaker, directing the documentaries and sponsored films discussed above. The freedom to tackle controversial topics in an unconventional way is clear. *Bongo Erotico* has been read as a film about 'bi-sexual lust'[22], but its focus is more than unusually elusive. Featuring a man and woman in bed, the film choreographs, rather than narrates, their relationship problems. The man seems strangely troubled, while the woman rolls topless and with a veil covering her face. Meanwhile Cocozza himself appears in make-up in what seems to be a dream sequence. His presence seems to agitate the man further. Later on, it becomes clear that there is a second man in the bedroom accompanying the action with bongo rhythms. The player seems to seduce the man on the bed with his music, while the film regularly cuts to an angry-looking Cocozza who looks on in a disapproving manner. The action concludes when the bongo player carries the man out the bedroom door, a shot that is repeated three times. After the end titles, the camera tilts up to the title of an unattributed poem, 'A La Nuit', which also features an illustration of an androgynous couple.

*Bongo Erotico* is notable not only for its stylistic experimentation, featuring the use of negative filmstock, but also for its daring subject matter and partial nudity. Homosexuality was not legalized in the UK until 1967, a full eight years later, so the making and showing of a film like this ran the risk of considerable legal difficulties. The use of female nudity also prompted the *The Sun* newspaper to proclaim that it was 'The First Scots Porn Film', over forty years

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[22] Cataloguer's comments on Scottish Screen catalogue.

later in 2002. The abstract nature of *Bongo Erotico* perhaps made it easier to negotiate controversial subject matter. As with *Masquerade,* it is difficult to fix the meaning or even the preoccupation of the work, as avant-garde films of this type often seek to frustrate conventional analysis. Clearly, the narrative lacks cause and effect, while the music and visuals, working together, are often dominant. This kind of filmmaking is clearly very different from the more narrative-based surrealism examined in the first part of this chapter. Two versions of surrealism are arguably at work, which might be summarised by the following oppositions:

ART CINEMA vs. MODERNIST CINEMA

*The White Lady* (1949) *Bongo Erotico* (1959)

MEANDERING NARRATIVE          FRACTURED NARRATIVE

AUTHORIAL EXPRESSION   DENIAL OF EXPRESSIVITY

THEMATIC AMBIVALENCE   PERCEPTUAL PLAY

To understand the creative choices made by Cocozza, I think it is useful to consider a distinction made by the professional filmmaker and producer Roger Corman, also working in the 1950s. In an article on his work entitled, 'Surrealism and My Films' written in 1965 he said:

> *True surrealism* is more akin to fantasy, or the world of dream,
> where we observe the subconscious directly in action; while a
> *variation of surrealism* deals with the real world, where the effects
> of the subconscious are described indirectly (Corman 1965).

Here we have a critical understanding of the differences between films like *Fantasmagoria* and *Masquerade*. While the former attempts to separate the real from the unconscious through the use of the dream sequence device, the latter suggests that this distinction is not tenable and that the two worlds are in fact interrelated. Corman notes that he does not think his films 'properly

qualify as purely surrealist. They're approaching surrealism.' (1965) He explains that this is

due to industrial considerations:

> That pure surrealism is a very powerful domain, the limits I'm
> obliged to observe in my work- also powerful! - compel me to
> explore the broader terrain of an indirect surrealism. One and the
> other seem to me equally useful, and the choice is determined by
> *necessity and opportunity* (my emphasis) (1965).

These 'limits' include satisfying the narrative expectations of the mainstream audience who

have paid to see the films, in his case during the 1950s the teenage drive-in audience. So it

becomes clear that this is where the amateur has the advantage in the making of surrealist

films; they have the financial freedom to make 'direct' surrealist films that would be more

acceptable within the restricted mode, than within the mass mode. The expectations of the

amateur film audience mean that there is a freedom to experiment that any professional would

envy. Films such as *Masquerade* or *Bongo Erotico* demonstrate that the opportunity existed for

amateurs to make films impossible in the commercial sector.


## Conclusion


The work of Scots filmmaker Enrico Cocozza offers a fascinating case study of amateur art

cinema. This study's provisional nature and tentative conclusions seem ripe for revision.

Around twenty Cocozza films in the Scottish Screen Archive remain unviewable by the

researcher. These include titles such as *A Spoiled Picnic* (1942), *Cappella of Enchantment*

(1947), *Ferry Flirt* (1949), *The Mirror* (1951), *Cameo* (1952), *Plugger's Picnic* (1952),

*Twilight* (1955), *Scherzo* (1956), and *Incubo* (1957). Appropriately enough, Cocozza's opinion

of his own work remains decidedly provisional. A film project that appears to have been

planned almost in reaction to *Chick's Day*, about Scots Teddy Boys called *The Young Ned*, awaits study:

> Said Mr Cocozza: "This is one film in which there will be no attempt to glorify these youngsters, or to put the blame for their existence on parents or environment. This film will say the teddies have only themselves to blame." (Anon 1956)

Suggesting little of the sympathy of *Chick's Day*, his remarks perhaps point to a change of opinion about the kind of film he had made previously. It appears that *The Young Ned* remained unmade, or perhaps fed into a comedy entitled *Corky* (1957). Towards the end of his career there was a move away from the social realist or avant-grade film toward the more accessible mode of the comedy, including works such as *The Cat* (1956), *The Bottle* (1958), *Bongo Bubble* (1959) and *The Silver Trumpet* (1960), his last colour film. An interesting case study also remains to be written on Cocozza's experiences during the making of *Corky*, that may explain his disillusion with the amateur scene in general and the decline in quality of his later work. Problems with local actors, an accident on set that led to Cocozza's long term eye problems, and the length of time taken by the production seem to have left him bitter. Despite this, the comedy was critically acclaimed, and he was invited to write about its production for *Amateur Movie Maker*. He finished his article in a surprisingly melancholy fashion:

> Two years seem a very long time to spend on the production of a short film. Perhaps that is what has soured me, for I have to confess that the final result does not please me at all. In fact, I am astonished that anyone should like *Corky* (Cocozza 1959: 292).

His increasing health problems meant that he had to abandon his filmmaking career and return to teaching, but he did not cease production completely, making nearly fifty home movies and videos along with many non-fiction films on local Wishaw life, and one feature-length

documentary called *Fit o' the Toon* (1978), which will be explored in chapter six. Julie Davidson interviewed him about it:

> "At the Fit o' the Toon," which marks a return to filmmaking after 18 years of disaffection with the limitation of amateur work. "It's just a wee historical document," he says disparagingly. "The technique is poor compared to my early work, partly because it's shot in 8mm rather than 16mm (Davidson 1978).

Cocozza's opinion of his early film career also seemed to sour over time; he later described *Fantasmagoria* as "corny" (Davidson 1978) and dismissed *Masquerade* as 'pretentious as all the rest'[23]. Cocozza's collaborator James Craig also dismisses it.[24] Craig's favourites are *Chick's Day* and *Nine O'Clock*.

Cocozza was buried in 1997 in Libberton, facing Tinto Hill. It was a stark funeral, which at Cocozza's request was only to be attended by the undertaker. His obituary tells us that:

> His gravestone, long prepared and a signal feature of his bedroom, carries three quotes: 'Lienfer c'est les autres' (Sartre), 'Enfin, l'oubli total' (Cocozza- 1921-1997), and 'Rien n'importe' (Mayer), revealing his continuing love-affiar with the cinema and with France, his honesty, and- Mayer being Louis B of Hollywood- his dark sense of whimsy (McIntyre and Park 1998).

In this chapter I have explored the relationship between surrealism and narrative with a particular focus on work entered into amateur film festivals. There are two creative approaches to this problem, an indirect surrealism based around linear narratives, or a direct surrealism where music and visuals are dominant. I have also explored the career choices that Enrico Cocozza made to have a sustainable film career based in Scotland. I have found that it was

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[23] Written comment from Enrico Cocozza's notes in paper archives of Scottish Screen.
[24] Conversation with Janet McBain in paper archives of Scottish Screen.

necessary to conform to the traditions of realism that had strong links to Scottish culture in general. Most of Enrico Cocozza's films might have been shot in Wishaw, yet he refused those limits of domestic and local concerns. Scottish cinema has not, as yet, been interested in fantasy films. However, a re-evaluation of Cocozza's career would go some way to creating a history of filmmaking in Scotland which would be more sensitive to the *pleasures* of the cinema of the imagination.

## (2:4) Academic Discourse on Artistry

### *Amateur Hostility*

As can be seen from the newspaper reports of the reception of the films 'by Enrico Cocozza' at the Scottish Amateur Film Festival, 'highbrow' filmmaking was viewed with scepticism and might be subject to cruel mockery, by a general audience of other amateur filmmakers. Not surprisingly therefore, whilst adjudicators from the professional sector often encouraged this formal experimentation, the amateur filmmakers themselves often were not as accepting. This is not just because of a 'close-mindedness' on the part of Scottish amateurs in particular, but instead a reflection of wider attitudes disseminated to and within amateur cinema throughout Britain and perhaps internationally. A cursory look at articles written in amateur cinema journals will confirm this.

During the 1950s, popular mainstream journals such as *Amateur Cine World*, often published scathing attacks on what they saw as 'extremes' of filmmaking practice. While in the 1930s, the B. Vivian Braun article 'Amateur Avant Garde' (discussed in the introduction to this section) represented a call to arms for the 'those who take the sub-standard film somewhat more seriously than the rest of us'; twenty years later there had been such a shift in amateur

film culture that these aspirations were openly mocked. Two articles written by Jack Smith are particularly illustrative of these shifts of emphasis (the contrast between the names of these authors is notable; 'B. Vivian Braun' has aristocratic connotations that seem remote from the ordinariness implied by 'Jack Smith') which accompanies a shift in the social composition of the amateur cinema 'community', now less centred on an 'elite' culture of Royalty, aristocracy and the nouveau-riche than the 'endless middle' of the suburban worker. This is reflected in the difference between *Home Movies and Home Talkies* and *Amateur Cine World*, the move from the private domestic space into the international amateur festival circuit is notable from their titles.

In his articles, Jack Smith makes it very clear that average amateur filmmakers showed no desire to pursue an overly artistic amateur cinema. The first entitled 'The Highbrow and Lowbrow Fallacy' begins its attack on a recent Scottish production by the Norton Park Group, a cine-club based in Edinburgh (1959: 1122-23). This school group's recent effort *The Grey Metropolis* (1952, 14.5 mins, b&w/sound), which attempted to combine a voiceover reading from Robert Louis Stevenson's observations on the city of Edinburgh, with contemporary visuals of the city, came in for particular criticism. 'It tries to provide a visual parallel to some turgid pseudo-poetry by Stevenson, quoted extensively on the sound track; this takes the picture even further back from reality', Smith writes (1122.) Films that have such poetic ambitions as *The Grey Metropolis* are frequently condemned as pretentious and dull. It is clear that articles such as these, along with Ivan Watson's 'Experimental...A Word That Covers a Multitude of Junk' (1961: 1036-37) echo much of the reported audience reaction to the Cocozza films screened at the S.A.F.F.

While British amateur film journals tended to be against avant-garde practices as a general principle, academic writing on amateur film tends to focus almost exclusively on the avant-garde. Within the academic study of film it has been easier to justify studies of a modernist cinema than it has been to study other less radical tendencies. A history of heroes is often more romantic than a history of apparent conformists. Due to these factors the development of the study of amateur cinema has been misleading and uneven.

There was never only *one* avant-garde, but *many* avant-garde movements. The avant-garde was not one homogenous approach to creating culture; instead there were competing visions of what the avant-garde might be. However, this diversity of production does not mean that the category itself is rendered meaningless; broadly speaking the 'avant-garde' refers to art that was produced in the first part of the twentieth century which was influenced by artistic modernism. These various modernisms either celebrated/reacted against or reflected the increasing mechanisation and the move towards life in an urban environment, during the early part of the twentieth century. However, the avant-garde wanted to go one step further, as Schulte-Sasse notes:

> Modernism may be understandable as an attack on traditional writing techniques, but the avant-garde can only be understood as an attack meant to alter the institutionalized commerce with art (Burger 1986: xv).

Therefore, the avant-garde wanted to move *beyond* a cultural practice determined by capital. There is a romantic spirit to these efforts, one that is often in tension with the idea of the avant-garde as being at the forefront of cultural production. The avant-garde promotes itself using the

language of science, but the artistic links to earlier traditions of romantic literature and painting are strong.

In comparison to the various movements in the avant-garde, scholarly writing on the topic often tends to privilege Marxist versions of the tradition. An influential example of this tendency is Peter Burger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, whose title itself suggests that there can be only *one* all encompassing theory of the avant-garde (Burger 1986). Burger's thesis develops a historical theory of art that suggests cultural practice can be understood through its patrons. Art is seen as having developed through three stages: the sacral, courtly and finally the bourgeois (47). Modernism is seen as formally innovative yet crippled by its ties to bourgeois assumptions: individualism and artistic subjectivity. He explains these developments as the logical result of the 'institution of art' (12), which encourages art to be autonomous within the material realties of everyday life. Avant-garde cultural workers must endeavour to move into a *new era*, one in which the 'total return of art into the praxis of life' (91) is made possible. He claims that in the 'neo-avant-garde' era this ambition has failed (58). However, a major problem with Burger's approach is that all art that does not conform to his overly prescriptive model is therefore dismissed as an inauthentic avant-garde. For example, art that has a tendency towards heightened artificiality is often dismissed as being 'formalist', because it does not attempt to engage with a 'real life' referent. Also art that simply attempts to *negate* the institution of art, rather than to destroy it altogether, is often dismissed as a complete failure. The insensitivity towards new avant-gardes, especially from the 1950s onwards, becomes a major stumbling block to the analysis of movements following the Second World War, especially in relatively young medium such as cinema. While the Glasgow School of Art's productions could accurately be described as 'avant-garde' films under the terms set out above, due to their inheritance of constructivist formal principles, the same could not be said

for the films of Enrico Cocozza. Rather than dismissing his work as a result, I want to argue that Enrico Cocozza instead represents an *art cinema* aesthetic within the amateur sector.

Within the study of professional cinema, Steve Neale outlined a way of understanding the professional Art Cinema from an institutional perspective (Neale 1981: 11-39). He characterises these practices as a reaction to the dominance of Hollywood cinema internationally; art cinema is often a conscious attempt to create an 'alternative' national cinema. Art films often privilege the expression of an individual director and are exhibited of outside of the commercial cinema space: in the regional film theatres, and during the first part of the twentieth century at meetings of local film societies. David Bordwell has also drawn attention to the art cinema as a mode of practice, with its films sharing a number of formal characteristics (1979: 56-64). I aim to develop these established debates by suggesting that the G.S.A.K.S and Supramont productions share what Pierre Bourdieu calls *Kantian* taste. He summarised this tendency by noting that, 'In order to apprehend what makes the specificity of aesthetic judgement, Kant ingeniously distinguished 'that which pleases' 'from that which gratifies'...' (1984: 41). Perhaps this distinction helps towards offering an explanation for divided audience reaction to Cocozza's entries in the S.A.F.F: he was making films that 'gratify', while they merely wanted films which 'please'.

In his later sociological study on photography (Bourdieu et al. 1996), Bourdieu further suggests that the *artistic* practice of photography, as opposed to its popular use, is most common among single, middle-class men (junior executives) who have aspirations towards more senior positions of authority, 'those who share the lowest level of integration into society, either by reason of their age, their matrimonial status or their professional situation' (39). Norman McLaren and Enrico Cocozza both clearly fit this description. Their advanced education in the arts also contributed to their initiation into Kantian taste, a process that inevitably pushed them towards the edge of the amateur sector.

So while some cine-clubs existed on the margins of amateur cinema culture, it is interesting to

note that in their marginality there was still dialogue and exchange between their very different

cinema practices. On Saturday the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 1954, Enrico Cocozza gave a lecture

entitled 'Experimental Amateur Films In Wishaw' at a special meeting of the Clydeside Film

Society, a workers film group, held at 16-17 Woodside Terrace, Glasgow.[25] The use of the

Scottish Film Council facilities, especially the small screening room known as The Studio

Cinema, meant that along with his lecture, four recent films produced by Supramont could be

shown to illustrate his presentation. What is clear here is that even at the time, Cocozza was

regarded as the originator of these films; a brief mention is made in the introduction of the

program notes prepared for the occasion, to the Connoisseur Circle, but Cocozza is being

marketed as their sole author. It is also notable that in the description of *Masquerade* it is seen

as 'surrealist but has a straightforward story', identifying the film as different, but not too

different. Perhaps connotations of 'surrealist' in amateur cinema might have discouraged some

people from attending the event. The alliance between these two film groups may seem

unlikely, a contradiction between the pursuit of politics and art, which the program notes

attempt to elide:

> He describes his productions as "experimental" and there is little
> doubt that his freshness of approach to the cinematic medium and his
> keen interest in worthwhile and progressive cinema were the factors
> which persuaded him to become a member of the Clydeside Film
> Society from its inception.

It is possible that the Cocozza films were being interpreted as radical surrealist works in line

with the writings of André Breton, even while the more obvious influence came from an

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[25] Programme from the Dawn Cine Group papers, in the Scottish Screen Archive.

enemy of the more political Surrealists; Jean Cocteau. Either way, a desire to incorporate these amateur art films into a more conventional tradition of progressive social realism, something that can be seen in the canonisation of *Chick's Day*, is detectable:

> He is a real "amateur" as he loves making films and he has no less an affection for viewing films. The impression that amateur films are "immature" cannot be applied to those made by Mr. Cocozza. They have been labelled "unusual"; "obscure"; "fantastic" or "puzzling" but he has shown, particularly in CHICK'S DAY, that he can tackle and present a serious theme with imagination and skill.

This dialogue between societies and mutual support must have been energising for both parties. Despite their aesthetic differences, it was in their best interests to be united in the face of such hostility from the rest of the amateur cinema scene in Scotland. This antagonism was not personal, but a result of wider cultural factors, especially a suspicion of anything that might be seen somewhat 'intellectual' during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Reports from the 1962 SAFF published in *Amateur Cine World* confirm this:

> The Victor Saville Trophy and the Scottish Film Council's cash prize of £15 for the outstanding film of the festival went to *Dada*, a 16mm. colour interpretation of Dadaism in the art world, made by K. Schaumann of Germany. According to an ACW correspondent who was present at the Cosmo screening, it was anything but a popular choice. "Most of the Scottish amateurs in the audience", he writes, "gave the impression that they knew little about Dadaism and cared less" (Anon 1962: 936).

The professional adjudicator and the general audience were again using different criteria to judge the same film, a mistake that as we have seen, many film scholars continue to make. It is tempting to see this as a national misunderstanding, the avant-garde seen as not 'Scottish', as both Enrico Cocozza and Charles Bukelis (an important member of the Dawn Cine Group) are from immigrant families. However, it is more likely to have been due to tensions within the ideologies of amateur cinema culture itself.

As the programme notes from the Cocozza lecture imply, the fear that most amateurs were only making 'immature' films spurred these more serious film clubs into action. Therefore, making and viewing art films was seen by these two groups as an 'adult' and serious activity, as opposed to the perceived 'childishness' of making and viewing other types of films. But the question then suggests itself; what did this so-called 'immature' filmmaking culture consist of?

# Chapter 3-

## The Amateur Entertainment Cinema:
## Aspects of Childhood in the 'Film Play'

<u>(3:1) Amateur Discourse on Children</u>

<u>*The Low Road*</u>

The amateur art cinema, while it had its devotees, was not especially popular amongst many amateur filmmakers. Two articles printed under the banner of the 'Viewpoint' column, within the magazine *Film Making*, are revealing of the reaction it provoked in some quarters. In response to an earlier piece by Michael Pearcy, eerily reminiscent of the attitudes of the 'Amateur Avant Garde' by B. Vivian Braun over forty years before, by arguing for 'new ideas and daring techniques' (Johnson 1979: 13), Doug Johnston decided that he had to take a stand. Titling his contribution, 'Why Amateur Films Should Have Entertainment Value', Johnson speaks out in defence 'of a lot of people who agree with me' (13) Clearly angry that so much critical attention and so many film festival prizes go to 'artistic' amateur filmmaking, he feels impelled to challenge this tendency, 'So far, Mr. Pearcy and I have followed the same course, but from now on he takes the high road and I take the low road.' (13) This journalistic allusion to a popular Scottish song makes explicit the cultural assumptions commonly made by those within the amateur cine movement; namely the dangers inherit in too highbrow a definition of amateurism. He warns that such 'vague pieces' risk alienating audiences at showcase events such as the Ten Best. Interestingly, Johnson points out the division with the movement itself:

> It seems that film makers are divided. On the one hand we have arty-crafty, "advanced", obscure epics with vague story lines which have "hidden meaning" (and if you can't see the meanings, you're not an intellectual). On the other hand we have robust crowd-pleasers

which do not have story lines (because story-writing is an extremely
difficult art) except for a natural progression from start to finish.
To me the division is undesirable. (13)

Johnson sees this division between the highbrows and the lowbrows as having the effect of

driving away sympathetic audience members, ultimately proving damaging in the long term for

the amateur cine movement. Such calls for a more integrated amateur cinema movement,

rooted in understandings of a desirable film practice, have long accompanied the development

of amateur cinema, often alongside polemics for an amateur art cinema, just as is the case in

the commercial industry. On occasions the tensions between the two camps have erupted into

such public arguments, but usually with little fundamental change issuing from these heated

debates.

Amateurs have throughout the history of the medium enjoyed making their own

versions of the entertainment cinema, often dubbed the 'film play'. In this chapter I will

explore this amateur entertainment cinema from a very specific perspective: films that feature

child actors. This, I argue is a tendency that over the years has proven significant in the generic

practices of amateur filmmakers, as is evident from amateur films in the archives, as well as

within the writings of amateur film journals and manuals.

*Advice For Amateurs and Their Actors*

A camera and no children,
How regrettable!
Children and no camera,
Quite inexcusable!
Children and a camera too,
The perfect thing in life!

(Natkin 1955: 8)

In 1955, Focus Press published Marcel Natkin's *How To Film Children*, an amateur film

manual that was translated from the original French, with the authorization of Editions Mana,

Paris. The spirit of the book is summed up immediately in the opening sentence of the preface, 'This book is for those parents who had the happy idea of acquiring a cine camera at the same time as they brought a cot for the new baby.' (1955: 3) Here, the incorporation of the cine camera into the strategic resources of the nuclear family seems complete. The camera is nothing less than an essential pieces of equipment to be acquired by all new families in order to be good parents. Essentially, a consumer and technical guide, this work is most useful for an opening chapter that attempts to account for the growing popularity of filmmaking among new parents:

> A baby develops at such a rapid rate that is seems impossible, to those who watch him grow, to remember all the phases of his development...Thus the images of early childhood are, as it were, stacked one beside the other in the memory. Little by little they become dim until finally the very recollection of the child's life that is constantly changing seems to elude the parents (1955: 9).

Such observations are fully consistent with Richard Chalfen's formulation of the 'home mode'. By the mid-1950s, loading a cine camera and pointing it at a newborn therefore became an important a part of the parenting task, with the reluctant suburban family risking charges of negligence for non-compliance. The joy in being able to document the rapid growth of their children, especially during the baby's first few years is palpable. Natkin's goes on to explain, 'That is the fundamental reason why parents take up cinematography, for a film captures the fragments of these innumerable episodes and seems almost to halt the passage of time.' (1955: 9) This is no doubt true, but for the purposes of elaborating the tendencies of filmmakers within the restricted mode, these points appear to be almost irrelevant. However, the teasing comment Natkin's adds is suggestive, 'And there is another, more selfish, reason for the enjoyment you obtain in filming: a film of your children is also a kind of extension of

yourself.' (1955: 9) This observation, which is not elaborated upon, is where this chapter begins.

The simultaneous presence of both children and a camera within the same household seems to have inspired numerous amateur filmmakers to move beyond the home mode and attempt to enter the restricted mode. One such amateur was John Stallwood, who reminisces about his experiences within the pages of *Film Making*:

> I bought my first camera- a Coronet Cub taking 828 film- when I was fourteen, which is the age of my eldest child now, and I can put my hand on heart and say that I have not come across any subject to equal the depth of interest latent in children (1974: 29).

For Stallwood, the camera marks the passing of the generations, while the presence of children in front of it becomes its defining subject. In the article which follows, entitled 'Kids Bring Out Your Best Filming Ability', Stallwood offers practical advice based on his own experience of being a professional photographer and an amateur filmmaker, on how to get the best performances out of children. In contrast to Marcel Natkins, who focuses on the non-fiction home movie where performance is not an issue, Stallwood is explicitly discussing amateur fiction filmmaking.

When making fiction films, like professional productions, the organisation of the production needs to be co-ordinated in order to serve the story that is being told. Part of this effort involves getting the right cast. In this regard, Stallwood emphasises the importance of choosing the right actor for the part:

> You can be sure of only one thing, when it comes to filming children: you picks yer child, and takes yer chance. After that it's in the lap of the gods. The way to success, as a film maker, is to be willing to take that chance (29).

The reliance on luck and chance is perhaps even more pronounced in the amateur sector, given the limited resources available. To find the right actor within the immediate area, instead of being allowed the luxury of a nationwide search, was one of the most difficult challenges facing the amateur film director. Interestingly, this process implies filming children who are not your own, countering the usual assumption that the amateur entertainment cinema was mostly just an extension of the family unit. This suggests that many amateur filmmakers actively sought out children from the local community to give their film something that could not be completed at home.

In order to get the best performance from these actors, according to Stallwood, requires all sorts of tricks and techniques. He observes that, 'It's a rare child who can produce a smile or a frown to order and be convincing with it. So we should find a way of getting it to break out naturally.' (29) Suggestions for provoking such spontaneous reactions range from never talking down to them, to even pretending to fall over to lift their spirits. However, Stallwood warns against being overly authoritarian, as a good working partnership between the filmmaker and the child is absolutely vital, therefore '...watch out for doubtful looks that tell you the child is uncertain about something- get them to give opinions, suggest ways of doing an action. Participation produces the best acting.' (29) The ability to listen and change your plans to suit the performer as the filming unfolds will be more effective in bringing out the best in the cast. In closing he reminds the reader, 'That's probably the main thing to remember when directing children: give them a sense of responsibility, and usually they'll live up to it.' (29) This is in stark contrast to the attitude displayed by Natkin, who jokes that the birth of your own children brings many opportunities for the amateur filmmaker, 'It is then that providence comes to the aid of adults and sends them flesh and blood dolls.' (1955: 10) In short, treating the young cast with the respect suggested by Stallwood will produce much better results than just pointing the camera to them and, like dolls, making them do what the filmmaker wants.

Two examples of Scottish amateur films using child casts are Harry Birrell's *When We Are Young* (1960) and Bill Dobson Senior's *Seven Wee De'ils* (1960). Both films were relatively well-known in their time, recognised within the pages of *Amateur Movie Maker*, where Harold Benson discusses them in an article entitled 'Children in Charge', which offers his thoughts on the use of children within such comedies. Noting that, 'Bill Dobson senior sent me an example of another way of using children in his *Seven Wee De'ils*. This like Harry Birrell's film was a prize winner in the last Scottish festival', Benson is dismissive of the film, 'I suppose this might have come off if the film had been restricted to, say, five minutes or so. But the idea isn't really strong enough to sustain a film of more than three times this length.' (1960: 779) The other film, made by Harry Birrell, fared only slightly better:

> Children have a habit of dominating this column; but then children, I suspect, provide the motive for more than fifty per cent of movie camera sales. Whether or not Harry Birrell's main reason for buying the lavish equipment so enticingly displayed in his family film *When We Are Young* was simply to record his children I couldn't say. In any case this keen Scottish amateur certainly spared no expense (1960: 778).

This once again re-enforces the idea that a distinct transition from making films purely for the home, to wanting to enter their work in film festivals, is observable in the works of many amateurs during this period. Benson's essay recognises this, and uses the term 'family film', rather than 'home movie', a distinction that will be explored during the first case study of this chapter. Yet, the desire to record one's own children, whether in the form of a home movie, or a more ambitious production, seems to unite both types of film. As we can see here, asking whether or not a film was intended to be a record *or* an entertainment, rather accepting that it could be both, is revealing of the tensions within the amateur mindset. These tensions can even

be seen to inform interpretation of characterisation within the resulting comedy, as Benson continues:

> So long as the children are in charge and doing just as they please, everything is fine. Elsewhere, however, the film is not content to observe children as they are, but tries to present them as cute little adults, a practice I deplore. Perhaps there is some humour to be wrung out of a four-year-old boy smoking or a girl of three using lipstick, but personally I'd rather not watch the wringing. Whenever an appealing child is got at by grown-ups to put on an act he becomes a sort of hybrid (778).

This idea that in such instances the image of children is being spoilt by such antics is a subject that is certainly debatable. Here Benson seems to be advocating a home movie aesthetic, where children can indeed do 'just as they please'. However, as we saw in the John Stallwood article, there are certainly degrees of manipulation that the filmmaker can employ in the attempt to get an affecting performance on the screen. In this chapter I will be exploring both 'pure' and 'hybrid' performances from children. The focus will be upon comedies made by Frank Marshall and action films made by Group 5. These two case studies have been chosen to clarify certain issues about the use of children within the amateur entertainment cinema.

(2:2) Comedies: A Case Study of Frank Marshall

*Introduction*

One of the most popular forms for the amateur filmmaker to use is the comedy. The desire to capture and entertain the audience is one that was held in high regard by much amateur discourse and is understandable given the negative connotations that often dominate accounts of the reception of amateur cinema. To make a sceptical viewer laugh is a deceptively challenging and there is a danger that practitioners of these skills are undervalued and

overlooked. Like their professional counterparts, comedy directors within the amateur sector are simultaneously popular yet critically neglected. This case study of the films of Frank Marshall attempts to act as a corrective in this regard.

The films that make up Marshall's body of work are representative of a specifically amateur conception of comedy. Unlike the aspirational amateur filmmakers who were working extremely hard to match or go beyond professional standards, Marshall seemed to thrive on working within the amateur mode of 'restricted' production. He often worked as a 'lone worker' rather than as part of a large cine-club, using the resources around him to inform the work that devoured so much of his leisure time. In this sense he is what Robert Stebbins describes as a 'pure amateur': someone who enjoys his or her hobby but has no intention of pursuing a professional career as a filmmaker. As the Chairman of the Scottish Association of Amateur Cinematographers for many years, he was instrumental in developing the remarkable infrastructure that amateur cinema enjoyed in Scotland. However, while he devoted lots of time to the organisational side of the culture, he was also responsible for more than eighty short films. Most of these works are variations on a few consistent themes that give them an authorial signature. While they can be broadly categorised as gentle comedies, they are by no means homogenous in their approach. The variety of tendencies is therefore sketched in more detail below.

*Family Films*

The category of the 'family film' is not merely a critical invention; there was actually a prize given for the best Family Film at the Scottish Amateur Film Festival. The fact that Frank Marshall was so successful in winning this prize over many years is revealing of the motivations behind his film practice. Broadly speaking, it is fair to say that he made films to

win prizes at amateur film festivals. He carefully followed the advice given in journals such as *Amateur Cine World* on how to make a well-made amateur film, and was remarkably successful, and awarded many international prizes for his efforts. Marshall's efforts however respected a very specific kind of competition film, usually utilising family members in their own environments. Whilst it would be misleading to call them sophisticated versions of home movies, but there are many overlaps between his carefully constructed story films, and the domestic focus of a typical home movie.

These family films are often centred on Marshall's immediate family: his wife, his son Nairn and his daughter, Muriel. The comic narratives that incorporate these family preserves are slight tales, spun around small incidents that disrupt the tranquillity of home life in Whitecraigs (an affluent suburb on the south side of Glasgow) before some equilibrium is happily restored. The mode of production specific to amateur cinema means that integrating your own family into your films is a pragmatic way to recruit and retain actors. Children are readily available, and can often be persuaded to take part in what seem to them to be a game: dressing up and playing at being a bit naughty. In this respect, family films expand moments that tend to be captured in home movies into more planned and logical narratives. Two films in particular illustrate these characteristics well: *Mower Madness* and *Les Bêtes Noires*. Both are shot in the Marshall family home using his children, and later grandchildren, as protagonists for these small moral tales.

*Mower Madness* (1939, 14 mins, b&w/silent) is a film that warns of the dangers of modernisation and the increasing reliance on technology to do jobs that were once done by hard work alone. If this premise sounds somewhat unlikely within the family film genre, it is to Marshall's credit that he manages to create a film that achieves this, with a grace which effaces the effort that would have been necessary in its production. This comic tale is structured using a device common in amateur fantasy films: a dream sequence. This bracketing technique eases

the transition from the everyday world into one altogether less ordinary. It also firmly contains fantasy within the logical and explainable, something more comfortable to many involved with amateur cinema than the illogical fantasies noted in the Cocozza films. In this particular case, Frank Marshall himself plays a family man who, while reading a newspaper, falls asleep in his armchair and dreams that a door to door salesman manages to persuade him to purchase a new 'top of the line' lawn mower to keep his garden under control. Thus the advertisements from the newspaper are given a space within his imaginary world when, the implication is, they would be given no legitimacy within the real world, in which a lawn mower would have been a luxury item, beyond the realm of even the relatively affluent family. In imagination, the Marshall family indulges its potential for material consumption and tries the new lawn mower out. The experiment goes fine until Frank is briefly distracted, and Nairn proceeds to tinker with the new equipment. When Frank resumes his labours, the mower refuses to obey the patriarch's directions, and takes on a life of its own. A double exposure of a bull's head on the mower indicates that this piece of equipment is not willing to follow Frank's instructions; pixilation allows the mower to chase the family round the garden, this stylistic device demonstrating that family films could be remarkably ambitious from a technical point of view. Indeed, the highlight for many viewers of this film comes when the lawn mower, having spotted Mrs Marshall watching events unfolding from the vantage point of a bedroom window, actually takes off and flies through the air towards her. The mower then flies through the window, chases her down the stairs as she runs out the door, and away down the street. At this point Frank is woken up from his fantasy when his pipe burns his hand. He resolves never to indulge in these luxury items in the future, and goes back to reading his newspaper. Suburbia can be a dangerous place in your imagination.

In many ways this short film is a good example of a mode of production achievable by the 'pure' amateur. It uses material close to hand- family members and everyday suburban

locations- to make the familiar a little unfamiliar. On the other hand, its remarkable technical sophistication makes it somewhat atypical to the kinds of films that were made by people serious about winning prizes at amateur film festivals. A later production, entered in the 1962 S.A.F.F, is perhaps a more representative example of the family film category. *Les Bêtes Noires* (1960, silent/colour) features the familiar elements of the family film: small children and pets. Taking these as basic ingredients, Marshall develops a simple story in which a litter of puppies run wild around the family home when Mrs Marshall's back is turned for a moment. Of course the children are complicit in this little adventure, revelling in overturning the well-preserved order installed by their parents. Here, the comedy is derived from minor anarchy: parallel narratives are set up whereby the mother hangs out the washing, the father is travelling home from work, while various items are destroyed by the puppies. The children are powerless to stop the pets from ripping up toys and furniture. While the mother may be near to the events that are taking place in the home, she goes about her everyday activities oblivious of the unfolding chaos. The only way these destructive and anti-social events can be stopped, the narrative implies, is through the returning authority of the father. Indeed, the patriarch does manage to bring events under control when, as the only adult around, he arrives home to discover what has happened, and has the power to change events. The embarrassment of the mother when she realises what has taken place 'on her watch' is palpable here as elsewhere however, but Frank does not play a domineering male authority figure; his approach to the restoration of order is far gentler, defusing the potentially divisive situation with a gentle good humour. In this home in Whitecraigs, the patriarch dominates through consensus rather than fear or division. Children and animals may misbehave once in a while, but this is nothing that cannot be resolved by a gentle hand and a group laugh. The family unit is firmly restored by the end of the narrative. *Les Bêtes Noires* may flirt with chaos, but the narrative works to bring these destructive tendencies under control. This is a far more acceptable vision of the world to

the majority of amateurs than the one presented by the avant-garde filmmakers also working in Scotland at the time.

*Public Service*

As we have seen, many amateur filmmakers were recruited into the sponsored film sector during the 1950s. Frank Marshall was involved in a number of Films of Scotland productions including *Isle of Lewis* (1848, 3.49 mins, colour/silent), *Glasgow* (1950, 3 mins, colour/silent) and *Harris* (1950, 3 mins, colour/silent). While these may be of interest in a wider study of the sponsored film movement in Scotland, the role that amateur filmmakers played within the war effort ten years earlier is of more direct pertinence to a study of amateur cinema.

Amateurs were recruited unofficially, by journals such as *Amateur Cine World*, to disseminate vital safety information, which under usual circumstances would have been handled by professional filmmakers. These articles functioned as a call to arms for amateurs to use their much-needed skills to craft films that could be used to educate and inform the general public. In particular, it was suggested that amateurs could make films on air raid precautions (A.R.P films) so that warnings about appropriate behaviour during wartime conditions could be highlighted. The film that resulted from Frank Marshall's involvement in this wider national project was *A.R.P: A Reminder For Peace* (1939-40, 22 mins b&w/silent), the pun in the title offering an indication of the slight twist that he gave his particular contribution, which was commended at the 7th S.A.F.F in 1940. Marshall could not resist putting the particular spin he had developed in his family films, into the potentially very serious subject matter being dealt with here. More conventional A.R.P films might have treated these given scenarios with a certain gravity, however *A.R.P: A Reminder For Peace* treats these precautions as if they could be learned as part of a family game. Indeed, there is a sense in the film that the war might not

actually reach these shores. Preparing for bombing raids might feel a bit silly but it is best to make light of the situation, after all we are preparing for *peace* not war. Marshall also injects a sense of reassurance in the narrative: these precautions are being captured for posterity rather than as guides to immediate survival. In hindsight, this gives the film a peculiar lightness untypical of the bulk of amateur ARP filmmaking productions during the Second World War.

Generic scenes such as those illustrating the covering of windows with sandbags, are given added poignancy when Frank has to use the sand from his children's sandpit. The children are saddened, but understand the necessity for sacrifice at a very personal level. A potentially serious scene in which the family practice bandaging each other is defused by the arrival of a couple of police officers doing their rounds checking the black-out. The embarrassment this causes the family, and the farcical tone of the scene as a whole ensure that *ARP: A Reminder For Peace* is not just informative, but *entertaining* at the same time. The laughs make the 'pill' easier to shallow.

One scene in particular illustrates of the Marshall touch especially well: when Mother sees a squadron of planes overhead, she orders the children and the maids into their own purpose-built air raid shelter in the basement of the house. Food being cooked is forgotten in the ensuing panic. In their retreat they try to remain calm by keeping themselves entertained. In due course, Frank arrives home from a day's work and is astonished to find no sign of anyone. He is all the more shocked when he notices smoke coming from the cooker, and immediately he prevents further disaster by turning off the power and removing his somewhat charred dinner. Somewhat puzzled, he investigates the rest of the house, finally discovering his wife, children and employees playing board games downstairs behind a heavy curtain. As his wife hysterically explains her motivations for her decisions, Frank realises that she mistook a practice run by the air force for an actual air raid. Pointing out the headline in the newspaper announcing the exercise, Frank sees the humour in the situation and never threatens to lose his

temper. Once again, the level-headed patriarch saves his family from a potentially tricky situation, quietly reifying the father as hero, exerting unifying influence over a potentially chaotic family structure. This ideal image of a nuclear family is not questioned, but is strengthened by the trials that the narrative puts the family members through. As usual, family members play a version of themselves; they even use their own names. The Frank Marshall family films attempt to acknowledge the difficulties inherent in their own domestic life (and by implication all family life), yet they is never any doubt about the essential stability and goodness of this structure. They may allow a superficial glimpse into the Marshall family home, but there is no doubt that what we see is anything but a carefully managed public face of their fictionalised private life.

## *Hybrids and Competition Films*

While the above films paint a picture of family life using the techniques of fictional narratives, another genre peculiar to the amateur sector, represents another distinct approach. Frank Marshall used the hybrid genre of a private non-fiction home movie, along with a bracketing device of a fictionalised narrative at the beginning and end of the film, many times during his long career. This is a typical example of the amateur creating new sub-genres appropriate to their own mode of production. Interestingly, these films are currently catalogued as 'non-fiction' films on the Scottish Screen database, despite their fairly obvious fictional elements, which demonstrates once again that amateur films are often read using criteria developed for the study of professional film. The movement from fiction to non-fiction is much less common in professional work, so the category of a hybrid cinema is less necessary. This blurring of the line between fiction and non-fiction seems to have quite common among amateurs, perhaps because it allowed these works to be entered into the fairly flexible category of 'Family Films'

at the Scottish Amateur Film Festival.

An early example of this combination is *Christmas* (1937). Films made by amateurs about the festive season were probably the second most popular of genres, after the holiday films made during the summer. Numerous articles in *Home Movies and Home Talkies* and *Amateur Cine World* give advice on how to make your Christmas film more exciting. Most amateurs, it is fair to say ignored these tips, preferring not to put effort into the planning. Instead they often shot the events of Christmas morning spontaneously using a handheld camera. A minority of filmmakers, including Frank Marshall, clearly read these articles with interest. In particular they learned that you should make typical 'home movie' material more interesting to an audience beyond the family by creating a strong narrative; this they were told would make it more entertaining. Indeed, the bracketing story that Marshall created for *Christmas* is instructive in this respect. The two children, Nairn and Muriel once again, wake up early on Christmas morning; or rather Nairn wakes up and then makes sure that Muriel is awake soon after him. They creep quietly downstairs and slowly open the door to the living room. There they see Father Christmas delivering presents. The sequence is somewhat expressionistic in its style, as the viewer only sees the shadow of Father Christmas cast over the surprised children. Instead of attempting to talk to him, they run as fast as they can back upstairs. The children have been naughty in coming down so early, they have now learned their lesson and are soon fast asleep once more. A dissolve later, some time has past and it is now safe to go downstairs once again. Earlier shots of them navigating the stars are repeated until they re-enter the living room. Now, the film changes from a fiction to non-fiction as the children see their presents on the living room floor. There is a look of joy on the children's faces, which would be extremely difficult to recreate in a fictional or staged scenario.

Something close to an epistemological shift has just taken place. The film has moved from being a fantasy film, and has become a very private record of Frank Marshall's own

children on Christmas day. The style of the film has itself changed; from carefully framed and lit opening sequences, indistinguishable from professional silent productions of an earlier era, to a static camera observing the children's delight in medium shot. This 'home movie' sequence lasts for three minutes before the film once again returns to the fantasy genre as the children, after an exciting day, are put to bed. When the parents leave the room and the children are almost asleep, a small fairy is seen dancing above the bed to Nairn and Muriel's delight. The reaffirming of the idea of magic, so important to young children, is used to bring some semblance of closure to the episodic structure. This special effect was achieved using super-imposition, a technique requiring considerable time and effort. The incongruity of a dancing fairy to a film that has a long non-fiction sequence means that *Christmas* ends on a light-hearted note. The tonal shifts between the bracketing sequences and the non-fiction core of the film are negotiated carefully to produce a rewarding viewing experience for audience members who have no personal connection to Nairn and Muriel. The bracketing sequences are designed to invite an 'estranged' viewer to share in the viewing of 'personal' material that might otherwise have only interested the immediate family. By making these sequences funny, surprising and above all *entertaining*, Marshall makes sure we enjoy these tonal shifts. This bracketing of private family material by a fictionalised story was also used in various other of Marshall's projects over the years, including a film of a baptism entitled *A Sunday to Remember* (1964, 10 mins, b&w/silent).

Finally, I want to conclude this chapter on the films of Frank Marshall by discussing a film that departs from the signature style of his other films outlined above, yet is useful in pointing towards the pleasures of an amateur entertainment cinema. *Joys of the Open Road* (1961, colour/silent) is a very short film, running for just three minutes and thirty-five seconds, which offers a good example of what was known in amateur circles as a cameo film. A cameo film was designed to use up the left over film of an unfinished reel, and therefore often ran between

one and three minutes. Such pieces were mostly pragmatic exercises, in which filmmakers could experiment by doing something a little different or unexpected. For this reason, the better results of this process were ideal films to be entered into amateur film festivals, in that they were short and often made imaginative use of limited resources. Most importantly, these films displayed a modesty that was prized in amateur cinema culture. In this respect *Joys of the Open Road* is an excellent example of the cameo film.

A modest approach to amateur film production does not necessarily mean that intelligence or wit have to be sacrificed. For instance, *Joys of the Open Road* opens with a quotation:

Come. Here is adieu to the city
And hurrah for the country again.
The broad road lies before me
Watered with last night's rain.

R.L Stevenson

We therefore expect a travel film documenting, perhaps, the wonderful scenery of the Scottish countryside. The first two shots of the film confirm this; first we see a shot of a 'For Sale' sign on a car windscreen. Then, following a zoom away, a hand enters shot to remove the sign. This suggests the car has a new owner, someone ready to take the trip of the film's title. We watch the car pull away with a close-up of the wheels, and we settle down to view the journey ahead. Instead, the next shot is a brief three-second close-up of a road sign that says '30', followed quickly by another which reads 'GLASGOW City Boundary', once again three seconds later, 'NO THROUGH ROAD' and so on...In fact, the entire film consists of close-ups of road signs! At first this seems quite funny, as the film has so obviously challenged the intrinsic norms it sets up. The opening few shots suggest one kind of film, while what is offered is something completely different. The filmmaker seems to be challenging the viewer to made

sense of what at first seems like a random selection of shots of signs. What is happening? As the film proceeds the logic to this madness becomes clearer.

As the images warning drivers to slow down, speed up, stop, go...accumulate, *Joys of the Open Road* emerges as a satiric treatment on an excessively regulative road culture. Using seventy-five mostly static shots, Marshall builds an argument in favour of leaving the poor driver alone! Amateur cinema's inheritance from still photographic techniques comes to the fore in this unexpected treatment. What initially seemed random, now demonstrates that its structure has been carefully thought through; ironic juxtapositions are made between shots that follow each other. A list of shots 10-20 is indicative:


10. SPEED KILLS

11. NO ENTRY FOR HANDCARTS HORSEDRAWN AND SLOW MOVING VEHICLES UNLESS REQUIRING ACCESS TO PREMISES NOT...


12. NO WAITING THIS SIDE TODAY

13. TURN LEFT

13. NO TURN LEFT

15. ONE WAY STREET →

16. TURN RIGHT

17. NO TURN RIGHT

18. ← ONE WAY STREET

19. NO ENTRY

20. NO TURNING, NO WAITING

The accumulation of instructions becomes overwhelming and quite why anyone would what to put themselves through this on a day-to-day basis is exploited for comic effect. A principle of construction is clearly at work; shot 18 offers the punch line to shot 15, while at the same time this joke brackets the contrast between shots 16 and 17. Marshall examines an almost obsolete form of montage cinema; which makes little attempt to integrate itself into any more 'realised' space-time frame. This unusual technique of (psuedo) still-frame montage emerges out of the mode of production that amateurs are confronted with, one that Frank Marshall understands better than most. Just when a pattern threatens to make the jokes predictable, some unexpected creative decisions are thrown into the mix to keep it interesting; shot 23 'DANGER BLASTING IN PROGRESS' and shot 33 'TEMPORARY ROAD SURFACE' shoot upside-down signs left by the side of the road. Presumably these signs were as Marshall found them, and their incongruity in the context of final film was used to make the punch lines a little less predictable. There is even a joke that was timely within the context of the Cold War. Half way through the film the sequence runs:


35. KEEP LEFT

36. KEEP LEFT

37. KEEP LEFT

38. MOSCOW

39. (A red frame is inserted)

40. ROAD CLOSED


This play on political symbolism is revealing of the attitudes of the kind of humour that was appreciated within amateur cinema culture at the time. This joke functions on a number of levels: both locally (the knowledge that Moscow is also a district of Glasgow) and at a wider

ideological level, as a warning against political extremes. This is illustrative of the type of humour of the participants of the contemporary amateur cinema culture. Be careful or you will end up in the actual capital of the U.S.S.R, then you will regret it! A red frame immediately followed by a sign informing that the road is closed is particularly suggestive.

The final sequence, in which a series of repetitive images are speeded-up until utter confusion prevails, represents the logical development of the film's thesis. Shots 59 to 75 are as follows:


59. CAUTION DANGEROUS BENDS

60. BEND (left)

61. BEND (right)

62. A LITTLE CARE GETS YOU THERE

63. BEND (right)

64. BEND (left)

65. A KIND WELCOME TO CAREFUL DRIVERS

66. BEND (right)

67. BEND (left)

68. BEND (right)

69. BEND (left)

70. BEND (right)

71. BEND (left)

72. BEND (right)

73. BEND (left)

74. MENTAL HOSPITAL (swaying camera, followed by a zoom in until the are words out of focus).

75. (Returning to the medium shot of the car windscreen from the opening of the film. A hand places the 'For Sale' back down. A zoom in until the same hand removes the sign to reveal another which reads 'THE END. A MARSHALL FILM'. Fade to black).

The potential chaos that results from following the rules of everyday life is a topic ripe for satire. The film began by mocking the sentiments of Robert Louis Stevenson's poem, and the highbrow idealism it is set up to represent. It goes on to voice the complaints of the individual when he/she confronts faceless authority everywhere, and this is taken to its own absurd conclusion. It is clear that a considerable amount of time was spent on structuring this film. Each joke is set up and has its own payoff. It is also worth noting that this cameo film was most likely filmed over a long period, every now and then when the opportunity arose. This extended length of time for a single production, is a strategy common amongst amateurs, as we will see in sections three and four of this thesis.

*Conclusion*

Looking back on Frank Marshall's long career as an amateur filmmaker there is a sense that it was done 'for the love of it', rather than for prizes or recognition. Those awards were a welcome by-product of, rather than a main motivation for, his activity. His example sits far easier within ideologies of amateurism than the G.S.A.K.S and Supramont Productions. The acceptance he achieved within the community of amateur cine was therefore less fraught and more generous than the previous examples I have studied. He is the embodiment of the 'pure amateur' in his modesty, craftsmanship and pragmatism. There is no sense that amateur filmmaking was anything but a fun leisure activity that he could involve his whole family in. In

turn, this strong family unit supported his contributions to the wider community of amateur filmmakers all over Scotland and internationally.

## (3:3) Amateur Action Films: Group 5

### *Introduction*

The films of Group 5 provide the ideal test case for the supposedly negative influence of Hollywood on amateur film production. Their films made during the 1960s and 1970s feature frequent chases, fights and explosions; ingredients common to more commercial films made professionally, but less typical of films made within the amateur sector. In this respect, they could be dismissed as merely imitating the professional models in an unimaginative way. They are the product of the shift in amateur film culture during the 1950s, away from the forging of a uniquely amateur aesthetic and towards youth culture and the embrace of aspects of professionalism. It is interesting that Group 5 emerged as a major force on the Scottish amateur film scene, just as the amateur art cinema, as practiced by someone like Enrico Cocozza, was falling out of fashion.

This cultural shift can be traced in the emergence of journals such as *Amateur Movie Maker*, a title that catered for a younger readership than the already well-established *Amateur Cine World*, although Fountain Press published both titles. These affluent British post-war teenagers, coming of age during the 1960s, were arguably less hostile to American commercial culture than their parents had been, and therefore their cultural imagination was saturated by images of glamour and action. The effect on young amateur filmmakers was an increased focus on making films within recognisable professional genres, such as action films. However, after close study of the films produced by Group 5, I would argue that the dominant influence of

Hollywood has been greatly exaggerated. While these action films do bear the influence of American professional cinema, they simultaneously draw on aspects of indigenous British and even Scottish culture. The action films of Group 5 need to be understood therefore within a framework of cultural interaction between professional/amateur, as well as American/British culture. This will become clearer as this case study progresses, however for now it is enough to point to the heritage of the group under discussion.

The use of the name Group 5 involves an overt homage to Group 3, a professional film production unit established in Scotland during the 1950s by John Grierson. This company was subsidised by money made available from London to make films such as *The Brave Don't Cry* (1952), which commented on contemporary developments in the Scottish coal mining industry.[26] This allusion to the short-lived production company acknowledges the ambition to make films in Scotland, while at the same time suggesting progress beyond the social realist tradition. Group 5 is therefore selling itself as the way forward for Scottish filmmaking when it was established in 1958. More of a loosely organised collection of like-minded individuals, than a cine-club as such, Group 5 would go on to make a number of well-received films for the amateur film festival competition circuit, films that through their distinctive style would eventually find their way into commercial exhibition spaces, and even television screenings. Their films represent an ambivalent mixing of professionalism and amateurism that deserves fuller examination.

### *Organisation: Amateurism as an Educational Activity*

This broad introduction may make Group 5 sound like a well-organised group of committed young men. This is true, the driving force behind the venture being Ron Miller, the producer

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[26] Similarly, as will be seen in chapter four: cine clubs such as Clansman made short documentary films about local Scottish industries. This particular socially conscious club, which was based in Aberdeen, was in fact the sister club of Group 5.

who co-orientated much of the activity, and who also multi-tasked on writing and photography. Norman Speirs has pointed out that, 'Ron Miller was an optician by profession, but his real passion was making films' (2000: 5). In most of the action films, Frederick W. McLeod provided direction for the large cast and crew drawn from a wide range of sources. In keeping with the divided nature of amateur filmmaking, while the technical crew were drawn from Clansman, the lead cast were mostly recruited from Aberdeen Grammar School. From a practical perspective, as the previous case study on the films of Frank Marshall demonstrated, children were frequently the lead players in amateur fiction films. However, in this case, rather than being recruited through family structures, Group 5 was part of the more formal learning of the school environment.

During the 1950s and 1960s, film was increasingly being used as an educational source material, for a wide variety of purposes. This included the illustrated teaching of history, as well as the more didactic promotion of good behaviour. However, enterprising teachers also encouraged the active production of films as part of the educational ethos. Through these exercises, the benefits of pursuing an activity for the love of it, rather than focusing on the rewards it may bring was certainly nurtured. Other amateur films produced within the Scottish educational sector include *Ad Inferum Buddy* (1952, 6 mins, b&w/silent), a spoof of biblical epics made by Enrico Cocozza during his teaching spell at Wishaw High School, and *The Pied Piper* (1956, 14 mins, colour/sound) a filmed record of the popular story of the pied piper of Hamlin, by the Aberdeen Production Group. What is interesting from today's vantage point is the role that children played in this process. While a modern initiative such as Scottish Kids Are Making Movies (S.K.A.M.M), run by the Edinburgh Filmhouse, emphasises the role that children can have *both* in front and behind the camera, amateur films made in the school were by contrast, directed and edited by the adult teachers themselves. Rather than being indicative of a cultural shift this could be merely a result of the complexity of the technology then in use.

The large 16mm cameras were much heaver than today's small digital cameras, so would be more likely to remain on the tripod than to be hand-held. Added to this was the expense of not only the cameras, but also the film stock itself. Everything possible would have been done to make sure that film stock was not wasted, which inevitably meant extensive rehearsals. Therefore, a technically knowledgeable teacher could preserve the educational benefits, as well as the fun, of acting in the school play for posterity. In contrast, Group 5 activity took place at the weekends, as their stories were 'opened out' from the stage, into the multiple locations needed for an exciting adventure story.

Thematically, Group 5 films have much in common with the fiction cinema that was popular within Britain at the time. When *Race To Nowhere* (1967, 45 mins, colour/sound) won the principal award at that year's Scottish Amateur Film Festival, the Victor Saville Trophy, adjudicator Derrick Knight described it as, "a James Bond story without the sex" (Millar 1967). It was tempting to compare these adventure stories to the Bond series, after the huge success of *Dr No* (1962), as well as subsequent films in this franchise. The Bond films have become the model for making blockbuster British action films that can appeal to the American market, as well as the rest of the world. While there is certainly some influence of this franchise on the films of Group 5, in particular marking the more ambitious stunts in their films, I suggest that other forms of indigenous British culture have more in common with their thematic concerns.

The popular thrillers, of the children's novelist Enid Blyton seem to have been the model for many of the scenarios written by Ron Miller. In her stories, a small group known as 'The Famous Five', saw off the villains through a combination of cunning and more importantly teamwork. This Manichean view of the world shows the inheritance of the Victorian melodrama in the narratives. What is distinctive about these stories is that the heroes are children, while the villains are adults. In this way the stories provide strong ties of

allegiance to its heroes for its pre-teenage readership. The Famous Five was made up of a mixture of boys and girls, each with their own distinct personalities that aimed to cater for the sympathies of a diverse cross-section of children. However, what all of these characters had in common was a comfortable middle-class background in the South of England. This did not necessarily limit the readership to children from similar backgrounds, as the continuing sales of the series around the world testify.

Compared to The Famous Five adventures, the films of Group 5 feature child actors who are all male. This might be for a number of reasons, including an indicator of the student population of Aberdeen Grammar School. What it does mean though is that the stories are less Famous Five and more like the American adventures, The Hardy Boys, in style. They feature small groups of boys overcoming the odds, when confronted by adult actors who are constantly trying to either kidnap or strangle them. These adult actors would have been helping out the filmmakers for free, and were possibly drawn from either the local theatre or the film production unit itself for small cameo parts.

Group 5 enjoyed a particular location on the fringe of British commercial cinema, connecting directly though its involvement with a range of official bodies, such as the Children's Film Foundation. The Children's Film Foundation (1951-87) was a non-profit organisation, which was funded by the quota-levy system in operation in Britain at the time. This fund enabled independent producers to make very low budget films for Saturday morning children's matinees, the rights of which would be sold to the foundation and distributed all around the country. The films were produced to provide an alternative to the American serials, such as *Tarzan* and *Flash Gordon*, which dominated the children's market during the 1930s and 1940s, and were considered to be too violent and of little redeeming moral value. In response, the British made children's films that would emphasise strong moral lessons. These films, all but forgotten now, exercised an influence over the films made by some amateur

filmmakers. Not coincidentally, the amateur film movement and the Children's Film Foundation share a similar fascination with child-centred stories that stress moral uplift. Moreover, the distribution system operated by the C.F.F, provided in theory at least, ambitious amateurs with a chance to make the crossover between a restricted and mass audience. It is in this context, that the activities of Group 5 might be positioned: as a way to use amateur filmmaking to move into the commercial sector, albeit the non-profit side of the industry. Indeed a newspaper report on a forthcoming children's matinee screening in the Cosmo, printed in the *Evening Express*, notes that:

> '"*Race To Nowhere*" was made by Group 5, a local amateur group. It was shown in the (Aberdeen) Arts Centre in February, and later this month it is to be shown to representatives of the Children's Film Foundation with a view to putting it on general release at children's matinees' (Anon 1967).

At this stage, further research is required to find out what happened to this plan, but it is also perhaps indicative that for their film *Vortex*, the group was awarded the Children's Film Foundation Prize at the 1971 Scottish Amateur Film Festival. The very existence of this award provides clear evidence of the involvement of this organisation in amateur film culture, as well as the Group 5 Film Unit's exceptional place within it. In triumphing over more conventionally organised cine-clubs, Group 5 productions demonstrate the variety of filmmaking methods in operation in the amateur film movement, which can be recovered through a number of sources, as will be explored below.

*Production Histories: Traced Through the Amateur Producer*

As would be expected from a highly successful Film Unit, fragmentary histories of their somewhat elaborate productions have found their way into accounts of the mass mode. These

include an article on the making of *Race To Nowhere* (1967) published in *Amateur Photographer*, as well as a short report on the use of a navy submarine in an unnamed production (which later became known as *Vortex*) in the recently re-launched monthly amateur cine magazine *Movie Maker*. In the article, John Wright, reminds his readers of the remarkable success of *Race To Nowhere* a few years before, which he describes as the 'Ten Best blockbuster of 1968', a film 'which shattered umpteen records both on the production and presentation side' (1970: 713).

What is clear, even from this short article, is that Group 5's chief publicist was the producer Ron Miller. This enterprising amateur producer, in issuing a press kit, was demonstrating similar media savvy to that of the G.S.A.K.S, as well as to that of Cocozza, the later in true auteurist style, doubling as both director and producer. In a role modelled on that of professional film practice, Ron Miller assumed significant responsibility, both in terms of creative and organisational decision-making, and for the promotion of the films during production and after. Spotting an opportunity for some advance publicity in the pages of an international film magazine, his press release focuses on the extraordinary qualities of his latest film, namely the submarine. In hyperbolic prose Miller set the scene:

> Water foamed through cablecars and over hatch-covers. Her Majesty's submarine Otter settled slowly into the dark waters of the Gareloch. Clinging desperately to the submarine's casing were thirteen-year-olds Garry Shaw and Ian Motion, registering panic as the deepening water swirled round their waists (713).

These scenes, filmed using no special effects, put the young heroes in a potentially hazardous situation. A picture of the submarine descending beneath the loch's waters, with the two young boys on its top, accompanies the text, offering verification that the stunt did indeed take place. While the press release underlines the danger of such a scene, the article attempts to put emphasis on the safety precautions the filmmakers, with the help of the authorities, took to

ensure the boy's well-being. Such dangerous stunts were usually filmed in one take, using multiple cameras. This is true for this sequence in *Vortex*, as well as in the case of the exploding car, as it drives spectacularly off a clifftop at the climax of *Race to Nowhere*. The *Movie Maker* article assures us that just 'out of camera range, the Navy's safety boat circled watchfully' (713). The complex nature of this stunt was also aided by the additional responsibility taken on by the submarine's Australian Captain, Lt. Cdr. Ian McDougall, who is paid particular tribute by both the filmmakers and the author:

> He and his entire crew worked with the sort of professionalism that inspired confidence in the production team, particularly the young actors, who were naturally nervous. After all, how many amateur actors do you know who have stood on the casing of a submarine as she submerged! (714)

It is interesting that in assigning the attribute of 'professionalism' to an amateur production, is unambiguously defined as a note-worthy quality in the re-named filmmaking monthly. Readers in the early 1970s are assumed to implicitly associate professionalism with 'skill', in a way directly challenged by much of the specialist 'cine' literature of the 1930s. Still, what is remarkable from today's vantage point of heavily controlled and regulated school activity, is that the boys' parents allowed them to perform stunts of this kind in the first place. While the young actors may have been keen to emulate, and perhaps even surpass the heroics of their screen idols, the parental trust in the filmmakers today, seems almost foolhardy. This perhaps points to a shift in social attitudes to the responsible care of children, more than anything else. The fact that the article concludes with a consideration of the technical difficulties presented by such a stunt, rather than health and safety issues, is revealing of the priorities of the writer and his readership. Discussion in these journals tends to focus on concrete practical matters, rather than the ethical ambiguities inherent in the process of filmmaking itself.

By 1970 Ron Miller was quite experienced in dealing with these practical matters. The Group 5 Film Unit had been running for twelve years, with public-relations elements of the amateur producer's role learnt long ago. However, a more intimate look at the realities behind the scenes than these short articles provides, can be gained via a documentary self-portrait entitled *On Location, A Day's Filming With Group 5* (1959, 10 mins, b&w, sound). This film is a remarkable resource for anyone researching their films. Essentially, this is what has come to be known in the professional industry as a 'Making Of...' documentary. This short account of one day in the production of *Timebomb*, addresses the audience in the style of a contemporary newsreel. The title card announces that this is 'A Film by Ronald Miller', and he not only directs, but doubles as narrator in what follows. The ensuing film becomes the ideal promotional device for an ambitious producer, both for himself and the film he is working on. Miller informs us that the events depicted took place on a Sunday morning in April, somewhere along the coastline of Aberdeenshire. The boys are setting up a camp there. Initially, you might assume this is for a scene in *Timebomb*, however, as the film concludes by circling back on itself, it becomes clear that these tents are for themselves to sleep in that night. Rather than a hobby that is worked on whenever it becomes possible, making a film with the Group 5 Film Unit becomes a serious commitment that runs over a series of weekends. Here we are provided with a glimpse of part of one of those weekend trips.

In keeping with 'making of' documentaries on professional productions, which might be shown at film society meetings and on television, *On Location, A Day's Filming With Group 5* assembles a number of scenes illustrating the practical realities behind the filmmaking process. In doing so, it provides an invaluable insight into amateur film practices, which could only otherwise be recovered through interviews with the participants. For example, the cast and crew are shown regularly consulting bound volumes of what the narrator refers to as 'shot-lists'. On a professional production this would be a fully written-out script. However many

amateurs, including Enrico Cocozza, preferred to work from a numbered lists of shots, which would briefly describe the intended contents of each in a couple of lines. This not only cuts down on the amount of time it would take to write out a fully scripted version of the film, but also shows once again that amateurs, even in 1958, modelled much of their film practice on those developed by silent filmmakers at the turn of the century. For Group 5, as for so many others, dialogue and performance were secondary considerations; grabbing and holding visual interest was the main priority.

Various ways were developed to mimic the standardised techniques of the professional action cinema. Some of these are evident in the sequence showing the crew filming a simple scene of the boys approaching a wall. The narrator informs us that, 'To give mobility to the camera, and to add visual interest to the shot, an improvised dolly and track are set up.' In a professional production it might have been deemed sufficient to film this using a simple pan from left to right. Here however, an old wheelchair is fixed to a couple of rails, as the camera follows the movements of the actors' approach, smoothly and skilfully. A professional technique is therefore successfully achieved on an amateur budget. What's more, it is achieved on location, rather than in the controlled environment of the studio. The amateur makes a virtue out of necessity, but the ambitious amateur takes it one step further in the effort to get noticed.

Something similar can be seen in the 'difficult fire sequence' that forms the main body of both this publicity short, and the resulting fiction film. Once again the focus for this documentary, as it was for the article above, is on a potentially dangerous stunt. The safety precautions are again emphasised: multiple cameras are used to eliminate the necessity of retakes, while 'the action is filmed in a rocky pool, for it would be dangerous to shoot in the open sea.' Dangerous for whom: the cast or the crew? One begins to wonder this when one member of the crew pours petrol into the water and it is then set alight. The boys are placed in position near the flames and the narrator continues, 'Sequences like this have to be set up very

carefully, so that the cast is not in any danger. Even so, once amidst the flames, they don't have to try very hard to act frightened.' Here the guardians of the children have taken on the persona of the sadistic film directors of popular lore; the teacher becomes the tormentor, in the name of entertainment. But while in the article on the making of *Vortex*, we can only read about how the children reacted in performing the stunt on the submarine, by contrast, in this film we witness the faces of the children as the stunt is performed. The filming of this action sequence now seems less and less a conventional educational activity, and more and more like a test of the young boys' courage, as practiced by organisations like the Scouts and the Boys Brigade. It takes on all the drama of an initiation ceremony into a macho world of tough stoic men, as the boys are asked to get much closer to the fire than a professional adult actor would ever be asked to. Since the action is in the pro-filmic nature of the scene, as opposed to animated or edited elements, the young actors almost had to live the roles they were being asked to play. As the narrator concludes near the end of the documentary:

> A film like *Timebomb*, running for thirty-six action packed minutes, needs a lot of organisation and hard work before the cameras can start to turn. For the crew it's a stimulating exercise, with new problems to be overcome at every stage. For the boys in the cast it is a chance to live for a while *like the heroes of their adventure stories*, and they work hard and endure discomfort willingly, looking forward to the time, when they will see themselves in the finished film on the screen (note: my emphasis).

The literary influence of British boys' adventure stories, discussed in the first section of this case study, is therefore acknowledged as being of importance not only on the filmmakers, but crucially, also on the boys themselves. Their decision (presumably along with their parents) to participate in these productions is motivated by a desire to transfer the lives of the action heroes, from the books, into their own experience. The relationship between the producer and his young actors, while on the surface it may seem exploitative, was rather built on mutual

consent in the pursuit of the shared goal of producing original filmmaking. As Ron Miller

acknowledges in a quotation from the end of the *Movie Maker* article:

> It's all very nerve racking, and it's a great relief when the footage
> comes back from the labs well exposed, sharply focused, action dead
> right. Then the months of preparation are forgotten and the group
> can rest assured that it has a sequence in the can that has probably
> never before been dreamt of for the amateur screen... (1970: 714).

The exceptional personal commitment of both the cast and crew has resulted in many films of

the highest aesthetic quality. This move from being on location, into the screening room is now

mirrored in the move from a focus on production methods, to the analysis of film style.

*Presentation*

The films of Group 5 occupy an in-between space between the short and the feature film. At

running times of around fifty minutes, they are much too long for a short, but not long enough

to be regarded as commercial feature films. As Enrico Cocozza discovered during the

screening of *Fantasmagoria* during the 1948 Scottish Amateur Film Festival, audiences can be

hostile to amateur films of this length. Unlike Cocozza however, Group 5 secured general

critical approval, and they positively thrived in their role as the makers of amateur action epics.

This may have been due to the changing status of serious amateurism, or simply to a more

sympathetic embrace of an amateur entertainment cinema, rather than its more artistic

counterpart. Whatever the basis for Group 5's emergence as the leading players on the Scottish

amateur film scene, what is in no doubt is that they made a number of high quality films. These

include *Race to Nowhere* (1967, 45 mins, colour/sound), *Vortex* (1971, 46 mins, colour/sound)

and *Oils For Neptune* (1964, 62 mins, colour/sound). These three films use the kind of strong

narrative drive recommended in the amateur film manuals, but frowned on by previous

amateur film theorists. While Zimmermann may claim that amateur film discourse produces films that are pale imitations of ideologically suspect Hollywood product, a close analysis of the Group 5 films instead shows how these inherited filmmaking frameworks can become something more creative.

The above titles are contemporary action films, with the expected genre elements. *Race to Nowhere* and *Vortex* both begin with authority figures discussing new technological developments that would prove dangerous in the wrong hands. Sure enough, within ten minutes or so, this proves prophetic. In *Race to Nowhere* the drama focuses round a key that can start a nuclear reactor, which is stolen by a maverick scientist. The plot in *Vortex* concerns a serum which was developed to cure the side-effects of radiation from cancer treatment, so that the dose could be stepped up to defeat the disease. However, a renegade submarine commander seizes on the military implications of such a treatment. These inciting incidents then intrude on the idyllic lives of the boys in ways that they could never have foreseen.

The boys in *Race to Nowhere* find the maverick scientist, Laxford, in a dinghy. He then gives them the key that everyone is after, while the trio of criminals at the centre of *Vortex* kidnap a scientist's son in an effort to secure the serum. The stories then extend via a chain of action scenes, rather than any subtle development of character. In narratives reminiscent of British chase thrillers such as *The 39 Steps* (1935) and *Young and Innocent* (1937), the children are then pursued by both the criminals and the authorities, as they fight their way out at every turn. The story and dialogue of *Vortex* (written by Ron Miller) are more successfully rendered than the awkward moments of exposition in the earlier *Race to Nowhere*, where the group of boys seem almost interchangeable, with few individual qualities. However, the photography of the later film (again by Ron Miller) immediately impresses. From the very first shot, of a diving mask being put on the camera to suggest a point of view shot, as the boys go diving among some rocky pools on a beach, to the subsequent underwater photography and later

action scenes, it is clear that these filmmakers know how to construct visually arresting images. Again, there is much in common here with silent cinema, as can be seen in the sequence in *Vortex* when Alan rescues Richard, as he holds onto a log perched atop a large waterfall. As the sequence unfolds, via quick cuts, contrasting large close-ups of the boys with the vertical drop awaiting them, it echoes a similar scene in the silent film *Broken Blossoms* (1919) when Richard Barthelmess rescues Lillian Gish. Skilfully directed by Frederick W. McLeod, *Vortex* manages to provide the excitement the audience expects to see in a film of this genre. The dominant aesthetic is visual, which demonstrates the inheritance of practices from earlier forms of film production. It scenes such as this, Group 5 offer a definition of amateur film that is less primitive than illustrative of an unashamedly archaic aesthetic.

Action scenes like these are scored using a combination of original and pre-recorded music. For *Race to Nowhere* the additional music by Alex Sutherland, is incorporated with free generic music, which was available from albums such as *'Music For Your Movies'*. Records such as this one, compiled by *Amateur Cine World*, were immensely useful because no dubbing fees were required as a prerequisite to the materials use.[27] Licensing deals were a constant problem for amateurs trying to make ambitious films on a low budget. The soundtrack also featured sound-mixing from sister organisation Clansman films, providing a realistic diegetic, yet atmospheric soundtrack (see especially the boys escape from the lighthouse amidst a violent storm in *Vortex*). However, the most immediately noticeable quality of the soundtracks is the Aberdonian accents used by the actors. This is one of the reasons that these films are far from empty imitations of Hollywood products. The stories are incorporated into the customs, culture and landscape of Scotland. This is evident in the way that the stories are built around industries located in Scotland, as is demonstrated by the oil industry in *Oils For*

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[27] *'Music For Your Movies: No Dubbing Fees For Amateurs'*, released by Fountain Press. The marketing material on the sleeve states, 'The trouble in the past has been that amateurs who want to add music to their films have been hedged around with tiresome legal restrictions. This record provides the solution. It has all the music you are likely to need for holiday and family films, plus plenty of weightier stuff for more ambitious productions.'

*Neptune*, but also in the exhibition of the locations used to tell these stories. The coastline of Aberdeenshire is used to great effect, making full use of the innumerable caves, cliffs, fields, farmhouses and lighthouses nearby. In this way, these contemporary action films are integrated with great skill into a part of the country that is so rarely used by professional filmmakers based in the central belt of Scotland. However, it was with a historical amateur film that the nation was most effectively allied with the action by Group 5.

*Donald of the Colours* (1975, 50 mins, colour/sound) marked Ron Miller's move from producing to directing. Eleven years after Peter Watkins's *Culloden* (1964), this film aimed to put the mythology and romance back into the history. Opening on the battlefields of Culloden, in April 1746, showing the clansmen lost among smoke and the sound of gunfire, the story then focuses one participant, Donald Cameron, who has managed to escape the slaughter. Meeting Shona MacDonald of Kingburgh (who later explains she has a cousin Flora on Skye) and Jean Jacque along the way, the three are constantly ambushed by red coats who are determined to teach the Jacobites a lesson, for daring to rebel against the British Crown. In synopsis form this simple tale recalls other tales of Jacobite heroics, including the amateur film *Fickle Fortune* (1930, 15 mins, b&w/silent), which could be dismissed as a category of filmmaking in Scotland invoked by the definitional discourse that Colin McArthur has labelled 'Tartanry' (1982a). However, what distinguishes this film from its comparators is that here the British Army are played by adults, while the Jacobites are played by children. At first this gives the film a slightly comic edge, especially when the latter sit round a campfire drinking whisky (recalling Benson's comments about 'hybrid' characterisations), but as the film progresses, the power struggle takes on tragic overtones when the British Army exercises its military superiority. Unlike earlier Group 5 productions, this film features a female protagonist, who plays her own vital part in the struggle and falls in love with Donald. Thus when he is killed, saving her from attack from a red coat, she symbolically takes the red and orange flag

with her, as she walks into the distance with Jacque; acknowledging his sacrifice, as well as being ready to carry his legacy into the future. The distinguishing visual trope of *Donald of the Colours* has the heroes walking towards the distant horizons in silhouette, as the music rouses the emotions. In this they become less real people and more figures of the imagination.

Despite these differences, this film still has much in common with previous Group 5 productions. The protagonists display a lack of trust in anyone outside the immediate group circle, a theme which is highlighted in an early scene in *Vortex*. As the investigator, Mr Carey, flown in from the mainland tells Dr Steven who doubts the need for extra security in the lab, "I'm afraid trust isn't enough these days. Loyalty is a commodity offered for sale, it's not always easy to find out who's paying." Similarly, in *Donald of the Colours*, Donald's suspicion of a farmer who allows them to sleep in his barn turns out to be fully justified when he informs the red coats where to find them. Also the villain in *Race to Nowhere* is the boss of the nuclear reactor, in *Vortex* he is a commander of a Royal Navy submarine and in *Donald of the Colours* it is Duke Billy. A deep suspicion and cynicism concerning authority figures is usually apparent in these films, almost to the point of them being anti-authority. This clearly separates the films of the Group 5 Film Unit from the products of the Children's Film Foundation; here there are no clear moral lessons. While co-productions with other amateurs groups produced more civic-minded films like *Residential Police Cadet Course* (1969, 12 mins, colour/sound), a documentary about the training of police officers, the group's main body of work is much more fun, precisely due to the anarchic delight to be taken in the simple pleasure of blowing things up, or setting fire to them.


## *Conclusion*

During the course of a Group 5 narrative there is likely to be explosions. Mostly these occur at the climax of the films, like the balls of fire at the end of *Race to Nowhere* when green liquid

leaks from the nuclear reactor into the sea, or when the canister containing the serum is shot, causing the collapse of the cliffs at the end of *Vortex*, but sometimes they also include fireworks along the way. An exploding boat sets the story of *Vortex* in motion, while in *Race to Nowhere* a car that drives off a cliff explodes for no narrative reason. Even in *Donald of the Colours*, the heroes sneak into the British Army camp at night to set off their barrels of gunpowder and to steal their bottles of alcohol. The films of Group 5 revel in going that one step further than any other group would possibly imagine.

In the process, they have filmed a number of child-centred narratives, which tapped into the American, as well as British, cultural currents of the time. However, the main difference between their contemporary action films and *Donald of the Colours* was that rather than drawing on traditions of children's adventure stories, they instead took the more unusual step of taking a story about adults and casting children to play them. While this was a relatively common practice in the amateur film movement, as can be seen in the Frank Marshall film *Thrills For Threepence* (1937, 8.53 mins, b&w/silent), where children are cast as Cowboys and Indians, it was less typical in the professional industry. One notable exception would be Alan Parker's *Bugsy Malone* (1976), made just one year after *Donald of the Colours*. I would not draw a direct on-to-one connection between these two films, but they do offer useful points of comparison for practices that were a feature of both amateur and professional filmmaking.

(3:4) Academic Discourse on Child Actors

*The Anxiety of Imitation*

Within the pages of recent scholarly writings on amateur film, there is little doubt that the sector's genre films have been relegated to a position of low priority in terms of research.

Compared to the amateur art cinema, the comedies and action film examined in this chapter are on the whole considered something of an embarrassment. In the effort to establish the study of amateur film at an institutional level, these are precisely the films that are ignored in favour of more self-conscious artistry, or as we shall see in the coming chapters, the civic consciousness of non-fiction amateur films. Struggling to match the standards of their professional counterparts, it does seem clear that these types of film are often seen as failures of realisation, as well as exhibiting a troubling hedonism. As a result, amateur films made with an eye towards entertaining their audience are frequently relegated to second-class status in archives and scholarly studies, a somewhat condescending attitude that has taken decades to change within the study of commercial cinema.

While these films have had little recognition for their achievements in recent years, contemporary audiences were much more generous to this type of amateur exercise. This is not at all surprising given that generic practices within this mode are extremely audience friendly. It was generally accepted by amateur filmmakers that the key to being embraced by the popular audience that were alienated by amateur art films, was to make films that felt familiar. This usually meant assimilating the traits that were recognisable from the commercial cinema, and incorporating clear characters and simple storylines. This does not necessarily mean the goal-orientated protagonists favoured by 'classical' Hollywood narrative, but at least figures about whom the audience should not experience a feeling of confusion, when encountering an amateur film of this type. The essential familiarity of many amateur scenarios, aided by stock characters and typed situations, meant that short stories could be told with considerable economy. Often these would employ family members in domestic comedies, for example many examples revolve around the potential pitfalls of the picnic, and as we saw in this chapter, stories involving delinquent children abound. Yet despite the harmless nature of

most of these films, there was still a palpable anxiety about the popularity of these generic

forms. Writing in *Cinema Quarterly*, Eric M. Knight argued:

> Give a cinema group a supply of film stock and usually it will try to
> produce a 'play' in imitation of Hollywood. If the world didn't
> produce another film-play for five years we'd still be over-supplied.
> Shoot sonatas of leaves and grass, tone-poems of clouds and water,
> gavottes in abstract shape, documentaries of the machines you toil at
> and the land you live in! But don't shoot a play! (1933: 203)

In short, by making films of this type, amateur film was seen by many as missing its potential

as an artistic movement. Critics and judges more sympathetic to the amateur art cinema might

see comedies, westerns and actions films as essentially professional genres, regarding amateur

versions as inescapably derivative and something to be avoided. For example, the genre of the

western within the amateur cinema might be seen, especially in Britain, as being overly

influenced by American popular culture. Therefore, amateur films based loosely on these

commercial categories tend to exhibit what I am calling an *anxiety of imitation* towards

inherited professional standards. While the films produced for the amateur art cinema display

what could almost be called a cultural arrogance, in that they try to be better than the

professionals, by contrast the ambitions of the amateur entertainment cinema seem decidedly

more modest. These work under the conception that no matter how hard they try, they know

that they can never match the standards of the professional. This anxiety causes them to adopt a

defensive position towards their work and manifests itself it certain creative strategies, as will

be explored in due course.

This anxiety about professionalism can similarly be traced in critical writing devoted to

amateur film. However, rather than focusing on generic practices, the debate has so far stalled

at the more general level of stylistic choices. This tendency can be seen in Patricia

Zimmermann's observations on the freedoms of filming:

> Both natural and spontaneous filming created through a static camera and special effects demonstrated the emphasis on control and manipulation of the subject and the film that simulated a distorted form of professionalism and an imitation of rationalized technical control (1988a: 35).

This quotation once again demonstrates a certain lack of development in the amateur film debate. While later scholarly criticism continues to worry about the ideological effect of supposedly professional formal-technical choices, the earlier film critics such as the aforementioned Eric M. Knight were more engaged with issues of generic imitation. Therefore, this section aims not only to recover some of the spirit of those heated debates, but also to explain how these anxieties found expression in the specifics of amateur entertainment films.

In relation to poetry, Harold Bloom has developed a theory of artistic psychology that attempts to explain how poets emerge from the inspirational, but burdensome shadow of their formative creative influences. This study, entitled *The Anxiety of Influence*, concerns itself with the confrontation of a novice with genius, and the subsequent coping strategies that enable him or her to find their own voice (Bloom 1973). Similarly, amateur filmmakers are often paralysed in the face of the apparatus of commercial entertainment films. They know that they can never match the resources of studio product with its large budgets and star system, but despite this, still aspire to delight their own audiences in the way that the musicals, adventure films and comedies do on a regular basis for the more general cinema-going public. The only way to *translate* this entertainment effect from the commercial to the amateur sector is by a shifting of emphasis: from the glamorous to the everyday. In amateur entertainment cinema, the everyday intrudes on professional-generic scenarios and characters, in an attempt to twist the familiarity of the sources, and escape the potential charge of being a mere copy of well known material.

Just as the British film *Bugsy Malone* (1976) turned the American gangster genre into a comedy, by casting children in the roles typically played by adult actors, so amateur

entertainment cinema developed this strategy decades before Alan Parker brought it to the masses. A similar spirit of transformation also informs amateur filmmakers who attempt to remake their favourite films with their friends and their tongues firmly in their cheeks, in a practice that has become known as 'fan films' (Windolf 2004). However, as we have seen with the films of Frank Marshall and Group 5, this amateur coping mechanism has a much longer history than has perhaps been acknowledged. The potential criticism of their peers was deflected in a move typical of amateurism: their attitude was that it is not plagiarism if they turn these established genres into comedies. This turn was aided in large part by the presence of children as protagonists, an issue that deserves further exploration.

## *The Use of Children: From Reality to Role Play*

The use of children in amateur entertainment films is often explained as being one of mere necessity. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the practical reasons for filming children were discussed by Marcel Natkin. Subsequently, later writer such as Heather Norris Nicholson have also highlighted the pragmatic use of children in a certain type of amateur film, '...personal and practical reasons undoubtedly prompted the focus on subject matter close at hand. Children were simply there and part of most family households.' (2001: 129) They were indeed just there, able to take directions easily and without fuss from familiar figures of authority without much questioning. This points towards the other main reason given for the popularity of children within amateur films, namely ideological preference. As Patricia Zimmermann has claimed, 'Filming children served as a visual elaboration of familialism.' (1988: 30) From this perspective, turning the camera onto the children merely reproduced the symbolic representation of the nuclear family, a point of view that has clear echoes of Richard

Chalfen's thesis. Historically, the popularity of this use of amateur film reached its peak during the mid twentieth century:

> This drive toward photographing children, while a common motif in the history of amateur filmmaking, gained additional impetus and significance during the 1950s from the social and ideological phenomenon of familialism that characterized suburban growth (Zimmermann 1988: 29).

This observation pinpoints precise developments in the changing role that amateur film, yet once again only focuses on home movies at the expense of the numerous films using children made within the restricted mode. More specifically, it ignores the number of *fiction* films that use children as protagonists. The question then suggests itself; do these amateur fiction films continue to reproduce familialism even when intended for consumption within the semi-public exhibition space? Or do these films show a completely different view of childhood? The following represents an attempt to answer these basic questions.

As we saw in the last chapter, children are almost non-existent in the amateur art cinema; this was indeed a cinema consisting almost completely of adult actors in stories aimed at adult sensibilities. Children do not fit into these despairing visions. By contrast, amateur entertainment offers more positive and active representations of children that is possible in any other amateur filmic practice. Therefore these films present a unlikely view of the world, one that as we have seen has some resemblance to commercial films featuring professional child actors, but effectively introduces a twist, namely the relationship between the filmmaker and their chosen actors.

While Heather Norris Nicholson's article on children and home movies does indeed focus its attention on what in chapter one I termed the *evidential* use of amateur film, there are a number of points raised that are particularly suggestive. By contrasting the films of Charles Chislett with those of Ralph Brookes, she is concerned with the different views that emerge

from their relationships with their subject matter. Here she may be more interested with historical evidence, not artistic expression or entertainment value, yet the power dynamics that she postulates have direct relevance to the films that have been the focus of this chapter.

Charles Chislett (1904-1990) was a middle-class professional from Rotherham, South Yorkshire, who worked in banking yet chose to make films about travel and social problems in his spare time. His films were often an extension of his religious convictions, and featured both his own children as well as those from a housing estate in Leeds. His films were shown at lectures he gave around the country. By contrast, Ralph Brookes filmed the children in and around his home in Ordsall, Salford. A dockworker by trade, he later worked in the family news agency, yet his filming was one constant among many wider social changes. His films did not receive wider screenings beyond the homes of his friends and family. The differing experience of real children documented in these films prompted Norris Nicholson to note, 'Clearly, the cinematic geographies which frame some children may have patterns of inclusion and exclusion that reproduce the power dynamics existing beyond the camera.' (2001: 132) In an era of abundant textual analyses, this historically informed approach towards reconstructing film practices of the past has much to recommend it. Explanations cannot limit themselves to the films alone, they must also move 'beyond the camera.' She suggests that these two filmmakers' offer contrasting perspectives on child poverty: Chislett provides an 'outsider's' view of subjects beyond his family, while Brookes' has left an 'insider's' record of his life in his community. This simple division along class lines leaves this point open to claims of being reductive, yet it can be tested and opened to revision by close observation and further research.

This particular study was motivated by a desire to uncover the reality of the situation for thousands of children in the mid-twentieth century, while in I have been concerned with films that present a fantasy life of childhood of a similar era. Yet by pointing to factors beyond

the 'text' itself, these methods can similarly be applied to the fiction film featuring child protagonists, as we shall now see.

## Childhood Through the Eyes of their Elders

On the whole, while socially concerned amateur films such as those discussed above attempt to document the problems facing children, the amateur entertainment cinema by contrast provides *positive* representations of children. Rather than being merely passive victims of inescapable social forces, here they are active shapers of the narrative trajectory. Both the films of Frank Marshall and those of Group Five place children at the *centre* of their narratives; they are not just there to provide framing devices, as was the case for Charles Chislett's pictorial views. This division between victims and protagonists could be broken down along class lines, as most of these fiction films feature middle-class children, but the entertainment films of Enrico Cocozza, (featuring the school children of Wishaw High School which were discussed earlier) surely complicate class-based interpretations. In films such as *Corky* (1957, 26 mins, colour/sound), working class accents are incorporated into the comedy of the scenario. Yet despite the move from reality to fiction, these films were still informed by the *structuring* relationship between the children and the filmmaker.

The fact that adults, more specifically adult males, overwhelmingly filmed these home movies is often commented on, and in a somewhat instrumental function, the resulting films are therefore seen as providing a paternal view family dynamics. This is nearly always characterised as a one-sided relationship, with the father controlling and manipulating the camera to re-enforce patriarchal points of view. The child itself is not granted any agency in this schema. While in these home movies the camera points away from the father figure towards the children, in recent years scholars have tended to turn the tables on these

filmmakers. Despite rarely appearing in front of the camera, except as a disembodied voice in sound films, the controlling gaze of the father has been seen as central for understanding this evidence of everyday domestic life. Norris Nicholson echoes this when she notes, 'Adult preconceptions of childhood may disclose as much about the adults in charge of making and showing the film as the children framed by the camera.' (2001: 129) The filmmaker's social status is here seen as revealing of the ideological imperatives of the film, with the intention being to raise critical awareness amongst viewers, in order to liberate them from being merely immersed in the surface content of the image itself. However, the question remains: is this observation equally valid for the fiction films of the restricted mode?

The main difference between the spontaneous home movie and the amateur fiction film is the pre-planned scenario. While home moviemakers rarely plan before exposing film, the filmmaker aiming to make a film or a semi-public audience would often draw up a reasonably detailed outline of the overall shape of the intended film. In the case of the comedies and action films under discussion in this chapter, Frank Marshall's mostly silent films would be planned in advance using shot lists, with dialogue being be added later using inter-titles. Because they recorded sound at the same time as the image, Group Five productions required full-blown scripts written in the style of professionals. Most films written in advance in this fashion would either be based on ready made storylines published in amateur film journals or manuals, or original stories written by the adult filmmaker. I have come across no evidence that children were ever involved in this creative process, further adding to the impression that amateur filmmaking was as tightly controlled as any professional project. These filmmakers were therefore writing child-centred stories for adults, a creative choice that tends to be rare in commercial cinema. Most professional films that are aimed at adults, feature adult protagonists, making these amateur entertainment films all the more peculiar. It should be noted that the films of Group Five were an exception in this regard, because these were films

aimed at children. Despite this, there are clear overlaps between the home mode and the restricted mode in the division of labour in the filmmaking process. Here the children effectively become akin to studio players, being 'contracted' by their superiors what films they are going to appear in. The structure of the nuclear family takes on the functions of the studio system, keenly prompting itself in a favourable light to the outside world. In this sense, the familialism of home movies is not that far removed from the familialism of the films of Frank Marshall.

Within society, children tend to occupy a similarly ambivalent position in society as the amateur does, one that is between worlds. This may help explain why amateur filmmakers continually cast children in the leading roles of their films. Yet to understand the representations on offer in these films it is clear that the social function of the film influences its view of the world, as much as the social status of the filmmaker. Heather Norris Nicholson has shrewdly noted that, 'Alternatively, might cinematic versions of childhood represent either a form of wish fulfilment- a means to tell a neater, less complicated story about 'us' and 'them'…' (2001: 137) This point has clear value to the fiction films under consideration. Both the family and action film explored earlier function as forms of 'wish fulfilment', the former for parents and the later for the children. In the telling of these 'less complicated' stories about the relationship between adults and children, the *aesthetic distance* of fiction, provides a space where people, events and institutions can be mocked or criticised in a way that is much less likely in films of record. This chapter has therefore demonstrated that it is just as important to find out who will be *watching* the finished film, as it is to find out who is behind the camera. The development of this approach will continue to inform the following chapters.

# Chapter 4-

# Amateur Cinema and Visions of Community

*From the Church to the Cine Club*

Efforts to fully incorporate the medium of film into building strong communities were concerns uniting various sections of society. Two such people for our purposes are John Grierson and George Sewell, both highly active and vocal members of the sponsored and amateur film sectors respectively. Their articles will form the basis of this introduction, before moving on to Andrew Buchanan's taxonomy of the generic practice of 'cine magazines'. The ideas raised by these three figures will then continue to inform the rest of this chapter.

Firstly, this tendency can be seen in John Grierson's, 'Films and the Community', which takes issue with recent developments in education, more specifically, 'I am disturbed, as I think many teachers are becoming disturbed, at the lack of contact between the educational system and the life of the community outside.' (1946: 123) He views the school as the place where the pupils not only learn the curriculum, but perhaps even more importantly it is where they learn how to be actively involved with the wider world, 'It is losing its relation to the community. Properly equipped and active citizens are not being made in the schools. And there is some suspicion that they are not being made at all.' (123) He claims the chasm between the classroom and the workplace has been exacerbated by the move towards 'liberal' pedagogical techniques that place the needs of the personality before the needs of the workplace. This conflict between the individual and society is becoming more untenable in light of increasing industrialisation, 'In fact, the individual outlook becomes less and less valuable and more and

more harmful unless it is transmuted into the corporate outlook.' (126) This highly instrumental view of education does not stop with the schoolhouse however. The Church itself is also blamed for not filling this void by playing a leading role in the teaching of citizenship to the population:

> They have the halls in thousands and the audiences in hundreds of thousands; people to be talked to, waiting to be talked to with bright and lovely arts. They have, even if they have gone lazy and lost their sense of privilege, a basic contact with the life of Britain (128).

This damning verdict on an institution that Grierson himself was sympathetic to, shows just how disappointed he was by the failure of the official institutions. He went on to warn these bodies, 'If they do not undertake this new teaching of citizenship it is more than possible that they will have Fascism- or Communism- doing it for them, Time will not wait for them.' (128) The danger was to allow divisive politics rather than participatory citizenship, to flourish if the present approach continues in its current direction. As will become clear, this prediction has much resonance with the second case study in this chapter.

If the official institutions were failing the country so badly, then its *unofficial* institutions would be the natural home for the efforts towards increased civic education. For example, Grierson complains bitterly about the lack of sponsorship churches were willing to give to national bodies such as his own; he notes, 'They have plenty of money, have the easiest access in the country to plenty of money.' (129) While they do not want to hand these funds over to the sponsored filmmakers, what this article does not mention is that they increasingly chose to make their own amateur films for such purposes. This was surely a much more effective means to communicate with their local communities, than merely commissioning a faraway professional. Indeed, as we shall now see, while the effect these educational films had on their audiences is difficult to measure, what is under no doubt is that the numerous cine clubs around the county contributed to an active network of amateur cultural participation

within many local communities around the country. In this way, an unofficial citizenship was in the progress of expanding, just as the official institutions moved away from these responsibilities.

In his four-part article, 'The Ideal Cine Club', published in *Amateur Cine World* in 1935, George H. Sewell offered his advice on how to set up and run an amateur film producing society. As the editor of the magazine *Amateur Films*, as well as the being on the committee of the London A.C.A (Amateur Cinematographers Association) and one of the four founders of the I.A.C (Institute of Amateur Cinematographers), Sewell had the personal experience to write this column with authority. In the first article, which is most relevant for the issue to be explored in this chapter, he discusses organisation rather than filmmaking. He warns that, for new clubs especially, organisers who want their filmmaking to be of a high quality have to be careful about accepting, 'unsuitable people who are nothing but a burden' (1936: 79). When Sewell separates the practical cine workers from the enthusiast, he demonstrates the hostility the more serious minded group had toward the other. In rhetoric which draws parallels with the commercial film industry, he notes, 'Remember what a careful guard the professional film studio keeps on its gates.' (79) This imagery would be especially appealing to the advocates of serious, rather than casual, leisure in their attempts to keep a distance between the two camps. Indeed Sewell says, 'It is hardly possible for the two types of endeavour to proceed side by side within the same organisation.' (80) This is proof, if ever it were needed, that creating communities requires a strong policy of *exclusion*.

Yet at the same time, there was certainly some sense of camaraderie, if not towards outsiders, then only internally towards other, more trusted members. For example, the distribution of equipment was carefully regulated, 'Where there is such communal apparatus it will be the duty of the Honorary Secretary to ensure that the distribution of the use of it is fair and impartial.' (80) This figure was of immense importance in holding the group together, as

they '…form a focal point around which the activities of the society will be conducted, a point of communication between individuals within the group.' (80) It is in this respect that the community spirit of amateur groups such as these cine clubs is most evident. By pooling together their resources in this way, and subsequently giving each member an allotted period of time with the equipment, they put into practice a model example of co-operation. While their films may not have been as educational as Grierson would have liked, these clubs nonetheless functioned as ad hoc civic organisations, always ready to contribute to life in community. This of course, took various forms, as we shall now see.

While he was on the whole suspicious of organisations, on certain specific issues of film production, Grierson was much more positive. Despite not believing the more enthusiastic advocates of the potential benefits of using film for educational purposes, who almost imagined the medium replacing the teachers themselves, he did think that it would be useful as illustrative material, 'Good: then let us have simple little illustrative films to do this simple job- and just those illustrations that are wanted and no more.' (Hardy 1946: 122) This more limited and practical transformation of the teaching experience could not be implemented in the mainstream educational system. He foresaw this method of learning as having to be rethought for other environments, 'The main thing is to put the use of film into this other civic setting and take it out of the less important setting of the regular curriculum.' (127) Yet the kind of civic education Grierson had in mind when he wrote 'Films and the Community' was only partially achieved. Amateur filmmakers, for example, did not universally consider it their responsibility to educate their audiences. Some groups, such as those run by activists and church groups, did explicitly set out to fulfil this social function. However, many more amateur filmmakers chose a less didactic relationship to their respective local communities.

The conflicting and contradictory projects that many amateur filmmakers spent their time on are well summed up by Andrew Buchanan's 'Why Not Make a Screen Magazine'. This article was also published in _Amateur Cine World_, one year before George Sewell's contribution. In the short biography accompanying this piece, it is acknowledged that he, 'Was Adjudicator at the Glasgow Amateur Film festival last December.' (1935: 102) As previously mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the 1934 event was the first of its kind in Scotland. He was also the author of numerous books on film and lectured widely on the subject.

In this article Andrew Buchanan notes that, 'For the amateur film producer who does not happen to be surrounded by an active group, equipped with studio facilities, the making of a screen magazine is an admirable pursuit.' (102) Therefore this generic practice is intended not for club productions, but rather for the lone worker. They could either be part of a cine club or unaffiliated, but for the purposes of producing a cine magazine they would essentially be working on their own. The restricted possibilities of the lone worker will here be a benefit, not a hindrance. This will be a valuable learning experience, as 'There is no finer training ground for the potential producer than in the making of non-fictional shorts which are composed of a variety of subjects...' (102) Such a production strategy re-focuses attention away from fiction towards reality, precisely the direction that John Grierson would himself have advocated. However, he may not have been quite as approving of the typical content of an amateur cine magazine.

In relation to subject matter, Buchanan was seemingly extremely open to the imaginative use of the filmmaker's surroundings, 'Your subject matter depends entirely upon you and as you depend upon your circumstances and your locality I cannot aid you to any great extent.' (102). However, despite this caveat, in line with many writers within _Amateur Cine_

*World*, on the very next page he is much more directive. As the following list demonstrates, Buchanan had some very clear ideas as to how the sorts of subjects the amateur filmmaker could build his cine magazine around:

> Firstly, your type of subject matter:
>
> 1. I should make this a busy city sequence, to enable the reel to open boldly on a quick tempo.
> 2. Someone making something by hand- a vivid reminder of less mechanical days.
> 3. Preparing a plane for flight
> 4. Some babies.
> 5. Keeping fit.
> 6. Somewhere that is charming.
>
> The above contents are comparatively easy to procure and they should create a nice balance that will sustain the interest throughout (103).

In a number of respects this list will resonate throughout this chapter. The last three ideas will be especially prominent in the films that will be analysed. The advice given in this short article did not restrict itself to issues of content, but incorporated questions of amateur film aesthetics. As can be seen here, Buchanan is encouraging amateur filmmaker to follow a different path form the commercial cinema, 'Assuming you are just such a producer and you feel you would like to make a film magazine, the first piece of advice I would offer you is not to copy the work of professional magazine makers.' (102) This piece of advice is in stark contrast to the more aspirational models seen in chapters two and three. In effect, non-fiction film becomes for many lone workers, a cinema of wilful separation.

These uniquely amateur generic practices tend to encourage and praise elements that would not be considered acceptable to the same extent in professional generic practices. For example, Andrew Buchanan wrote, 'I am a great believer in purely scenic sequences and I

advise you to develop this type of material. Do not look for a "story," nor even think it necessary to film some world-famous village, cathedral or historic ruin' (105) This comment demonstrates that he has some understanding about the sorts of material that the amateur filmmaker tends to be drawn to, and more importantly, are within their means. Many lone workers would not have the equipment to record sound, but Buchanan does not see this as a creative barrier. Instead they were to work around it, 'Fortunately for your continuity, you are not making a sound film, so that your dividing titles will account for lapses of time in the process you are going to show.' (104) This kind of ingenuity, shown by so many amateur filmmakers over the years despite their technological limitations, is in full evidence in the two case studies to follow. The lone workers who produced their own cine magazines, under the umbrella organisations of the Edinburgh Cine Society and the Dawn Cine Group, employed similar means to capture the spirit of community life that they were themselves part of. The similarity between the cine magazines of such socially and economically divergent groups (one a mainstream cine club and the other a workers cine club) is certainly intriguing, and therefore deserves to be explored at some length.

(4:2) Club Films: The Edinburgh Cine Society

*Introduction*

> 'Filmmaking existing on the periphery of the commercial world, but
> not confined to the domestic sphere requires a community of
> dedicated and enthusiastic participants as well as a fortified
> foundation to ensure its survival.'
>
> (Stone 2003: 222)

Filmmakers have long been interested in turning the camera back on themselves. In Hollywood this tendency has produced such diverse fiction films as *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder,

1950), *Singin' In the Rain* (Stanley Donen, Gene Kelly, 1952), *The Bad and the Beautiful* (Vincente Minnelli, 1952) and *The Player* (Robert Altman, 1992). American independent filmmakers have also found this a potentially rich source of comedy in films like *In the Soup* (Alexandre Rockwell, 1992) and *Ed Wood* (Tim Burton, 1994), while in Europe, *Le Mépris* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963) and *Day For Night* ( François Truffaut, 1973) stand as the definitive statements about the pain as well as the pleasures of the filmmaking process. What all these films have in common is that they all weave narratives around fictional characters. Critics can attempt to work out which real life figures these stories are based on, a strategy encouraged by the filmmakers themselves in casting famous film personalities to play themselves. Mostly this is framed as harmless fun; only occasionally does the laughter slip into biting satire.

This impulse to turn the camera back on the filmmaking environment has also gripped the amateur filmmaker over the years, as we shall see from films made about the Edinburgh Cine Society. Yet the self-reflexive nature of this type of filmmaking is significantly altered in the transition to the amateur sector. This is partially due to fact that here I have chosen to concentrate on non-fiction club fictions at the expense of the more planned fictional variety. However, we must also consider the social conditions of its *mode of production*, an issue that we should now turn if we hope to understand the reasons behind the production and exhibition of these non-fiction club films.

## Cine-Club Culture: 'A Second Family'

Cine-clubs were not solely about making films; they were also a highly *social* activity. Just as other leisure pursuits attract both the serious minded and those who just want to meet new people, so it is with amateur filmmaking, as one programme secretary noted:

> Now it is obviously a very good idea to have some evenings devoted to the screening of members' own films but, to be honest, most people who patronise cine clubs do not make *films*! They expose cine film- the family at the zoo, 'sur la page' and all dressed-up for young Valerie's wedding. But after that very few of them bother to title their material, and fewer still edit it or attempt to add sound. It is sad that so many deny themselves the pleasure that these refinements of the hobby can bring (White 1961: 7).

By only focusing on these serious minded filmmakers such as Enrico Cocozza or Group 5 a distorted picture of the amateur film culture could be established. The majority of most cine-club members were instead professional people who were looking to enjoy their weekly meetings and occasional weekends away. The tension between the priorities of these very different amateurs would be once again revealing of the fundamental split within ideologies of amateurism as it developed during the mid-twentieth century.

Early cine-clubs often developed out of either film societies or pre-cursor leisure groups known as 'camera clubs'. Those already interested in photography were seen as most likely to be willing to experiment with new technologies much as motion picture cameras. Technical knowledge gained from still photography was often transferable into the realm of 16mm production; therefore an established market could be tapped into. Cine-clubs did not replace camera clubs; they have indeed persisted to this day, outlasting the cine-clubs themselves. Instead these clubs were effectively rivals, attempting to attract similarly minded people to their particular club. However, on rare occasions they have been able to work together. For example, the Edinburgh Cine Society demonstrated an ability to collaborate with such camera clubs. In an article published in *Amateur Cine World*, December 1957, it notes that '…although a cine society, we still have a strong still section. At least two nights during the session are devoted to their interests.' (Sansom 1957: 812) This shows that the two clubs could operate on shared premises, but how far they creatively collaborated is yet to be established.

As already noted, more often cine-clubs emerged out of the film society movement. They have been variously described as 'film clubs', 'movie clubs' or 'hobby clubs' (Stone 2002). This perhaps points to the difference aims and ambitions of these leisure groups: whether they are chiefly interested in watching or making films, or both. Here, I will use 'film society' for organisations that concentrated on screening films, while reserving the term 'cine-club' for groups that *made* their own films. However, there was often a symbiotic relationship amongst these two types of organisation, as film societies recruited crew for cine-club films from interested audience members.

In Britain before the advent of television, membership of national bodies such as the Federation of Film Societies meant that film prints were made available for local screenings of films that were out of commercial circulation. 16mm film prints of commercial feature films and shorts could be rented from the British Film Institute, and the Central Film Library of the Central Office of Information. The Institute of Amateur Cinematographers, which was based in Epsom, Surrey, could also provide exceptional amateur films for screenings. The film society magazine *Sequence* would be available for purchase at such events.

These screenings were held in either rented public spaces such as regional film theatres or town hall, or in some cases in premises owned by the clubs themselves. As a representative from the Edinburgh Cine Society explained at the time:

> There can be no doubt that a club cannot really thrive without an adequate meeting place where members can not only show films but make them as well. A rota of meetings in the homes of various members can be made to work well enough for a time, but permanent headquarters eventually become a necessity (Anon 1948: 20).

The exhibition of club films therefore requires space outside the home to run over the duration, not just for the screening of films, but also for filming and editing. Perhaps even more

important than that, for some members at least, was space for socialising. Between the screenings of films there would be intermissions where members could drink tea, eat biscuits and chat to their fellow members. Conversation would vary from discussions about the films or presentation they had just seen, to technical matters for future productions, to life in general.

These opportunities for discussion about personal matters should not just be seen as trivial by-products of filmmaking activity, since for many it was the main reason to participate in such a club. As Melinda Stone has noted, 'The club is a second family for its members providing necessary comfort and joy in times of suffering and celebration.' (Stone 2003: 228) The pleasure gained from associating yourself with a club was not only the sense of doing something worthwhile with your time, i.e. making documentary films on local civic life, but also more profoundly personal. People did not just nobly sacrifice their time; instead they expected to get something in return. This could be variously described as a sense of identity, or the chance to be part of a shared experience amongst people with similar backgrounds and lifestyles. When personal sacrifice began to outweigh the potential benefits, then membership decline was inevitable.

The typical cine-club could be broken down into primary and ancillary activities in the following fashion. The primary activities echoed many of the features of any well-organised leisure club. On payment of a standard fee, each person is issued with a numbered membership card which functions both as an official welcoming of entry into the group and as a method of generating regular income. A committee of elected positions including a president, vice-presidents, a secretary, a treasurer, a membership secretary, a hostess and a programme secretary, oversaw the larger organisation of the club. These were unpaid positions that nonetheless required a significant amount of commitment of the individual's free time. The business of the clubs was discussed at regular committee meetings and the annual general meeting where members themselves could bring up any issues of concern.

The membership of these clubs was often drawn from a narrow section of society, mostly being made up of middle-class professional men, and sometimes their spouses. Sporadic effort to widen membership was attempted, but the common-interests of the main body of participants, namely travel and children, meant that newcomers could feel out of place. Reflecting the leisure status of this form of filmmaking, most cine-clubs were of a non-political nature. Those rare clubs that explicitly set out to screen and make films with political content tended to have difficulty with retaining membership and hence raising funds for filmmaking, as will be seen later on in this chapter with the Dawn Cine Group. Groups that programmed more accessible films had a greater possibility of sustaining a regular income and therefore made more film themselves.

At the height of popularity of the cine-club movement, members met at least once a week to either show their own or a neighbouring club's films, as well as providing an opportunity to view commercial films for educational purposes. It did not matter what events were the focus of the programme, more the simple act of getting members together on a regular and consistent basis. For example, the Edinburgh Cine Society held meetings every Friday, which allowed the weekends for shooting. As a club official noted at the time:

> A success story like this cannot be repeated today, but the time will come...And until it does, the great thing is to go on meeting *regularly*, however limited or inadequate the meeting place. It is all too easy a step from infrequent meetings to none at all. Projection nights and discussions are not in themselves sufficient to keep interest alive. If film production cannot be undertaken, at least there should be occasional demonstrations of some aspects of film work such as titling or editing (Anon 1948: 20).

These demonstrations took many forms, mostly focusing on technical concerns, as this provides the most significant barrier of entry to the novice filmmaker and is one of the main reasons filmmakers decided to join cine clubs. Talks by senior members of the club on issues

of film history such as the great films, directors, actors, and studios were also common staples of these get-togethers. These talks would be followed by question and answer sessions where knowledge was contested and shared amongst the membership. On occasions it was known for guest speakers to be brought in to address the membership. These were usually prominent filmmakers from within reasonable travelling distance, such as when Enrico Cocozza visited the Dawn Cine Group or when Frank Marshall addressed the Edinburgh Cine Society. These creative and social exchanges helped built a sense of camaraderie amongst groups and individuals that would otherwise have only crossed paths during the more competitive atmosphere of the external amateur film contests.

By contrast, a sense of competitiveness amongst the membership was encouraged when the bigger clubs organised internal contests, where individuals worked less as part of a larger team and more as lone workers. However, this seemingly open format was put under pressure when it came to deciding who won. These competitions could take the form of popularity contests, 'biasing the more social contingent, who receive more votes, not for good filmmaking, but for having more friends.' (Stone 2003: 233) This observation challenges any romantic views that people may have about the cine-clubs, revealing that personal tensions and political rivalries were just as common in leisure pursuits as in the workplace.

Despite this, and away from these competitive energies, members could find solace in the more social aspects of cine-club culture. It should be noted that while I am labelling these as ancillary activities, they required as much of planning and organisation as the film contests. Therefore, while the amateurs who helped bring people together on a regular basis may not have left behind bodies of work that can be studied by researchers, they were still a vital part of the success of the cine-club movement as a whole. The *bridge* between these primary and ancillary activities was the club newsletter, which not only detailed the minutes from meetings, but also kept members up to date with plans for future events. The advantage of this system

was that even members who, due to other commitments, might not make it along to the weekly meetings could still be kept informed of all the latest club news.

Announcements in these newsletters included both information about film related activity, as well as the more family orientated events. For example, future screenings were detailed, and space was often also provided for feedback from members about the committee's choice of films. In these pages members were encouraged to bring along guests to future screenings as a way to recruit more people to the society. Events such as intra-club film exchanges were also detailed to increase advance awareness of special events, while cine-quizzes were a fun way of testing the knowledge of members against neighbouring cine-clubs. Ancillary activities such as these were chiefly geared towards the raising of funds to allow the society to continue its programme of screenings and film productions.

This financial motive was most explicit in the regular fund raising events that took place throughout the year. This included raffles, whist drives and the annual dinner and award ceremony. At events such as these, members appeal to the good will of the general public, in much the same way as a charity, to help raise the funds to pay for the maintenance of facilities and the costs of group outings. During the summer months at least, picnics in the park and trips to the beach were occasions when members could involve their whole family in this spirit of camaraderie.

These aspects of cine-club culture are well known. What is currently much less appreciated is how regularly members of the club turned their cameras back on *themselves* and documented these charity events and outings in the form of the filmed record. Examples of the 'club-film' are so common in film archives that it would be advantageous to now be considered a genre all of its own.

These numerous films featuring members at play effectively represent the *crossover* of the two main interests of the cine-clubs: film production and socialising. In preserving these

images of these special events, the clubs allow us access to selective memories of this social

movement at the height of its popularity. Melinda Stone notes that:

> Studying the community created by the SDAMC to support their
> cinema practice, not only presents a model for contemporary
> independent filmmakers to pursue similar outlets, it also provides
> insight into the films created by the members of the club (Stone
> 2003: 223).

Reversing this observation somewhat, rather than information about the clubs giving us insight

into films that they made, in this section I instead suggest that the films that they made give us

valuable visual access into the cine-clubs themselves. Therefore, appreciating the highly

organised nature of the cine-clubs not only helps analysis of their more crafted fiction films

and documentaries which form the basis of the rest of this thesis, but also makes us understand

*why* they were so pre-occupied with recording specific social events such as outings and

picnics in the first place. In what follows, I suggest that it is for reasons that have clear

parallels to other more documented forms of film activity, both commercially and privately

produced.

## Cine-Club Films

Within the Scottish Screen Archive many examples of cine-club films can be found that

suggest this category of film is not clear-cut and homogenous. These variations as well as

overlaps will be explored in relation to three films: *Edinburgh Cine Society Outing to Sougall

Bay* (1938), *Thistle Meets Rose* (1948) and *The Gala Premiere of Seven Ages* (1969). All of

these films display an affectionate image of life as part of a cine-club, but for different reasons

and from slightly different perspectives. This section will begin with a content analysis of these

variants of community films, before moving on to examine the structure and stylistic issues that these films raise. Towards the end of this case study of club films a consideration of issues related to the exhibition will attempt to build on the observations made below. For now, a basic outline of the content of these three films will be sufficient to provide entry into these wider debates.

As noted in the first part of this chapter, cine-clubs often had at least one day out a year as a group. This trip would be a special occasion for all those involved, therefore at least one member of the society would decide to bring their cine camera along. The result would be a film like *Edinburgh Cine Society Outing to Sougall Bay* (1938, 5.17 mins, colour/silent). The film juxtaposes footage shot the previous year, before announcing via a title card, 'Same place but a year later!' making fun of the routine nature of this particular annual trip to the beach in the process.

The early part of this film features members and their family running towards camera, enjoying the open spaces, fresh air, as well as the chance to be caught on camera. Following the informal fun and games on arrival, the more organised programme of events begins to structure their day. This includes what the title card calls, 'The inspection', where people get dressed up and line up to be judged. The morning's activities are brought to a standstill for a group picnic amongst the dunes, before everyone moves onto a nearby area of grass for semi-competitive races. As the day is brought to a close people line up to get back on the buses to take them home, yet most turn to the camera to give a quick wave, not only to acknowledge the filmmaker present, but more importantly for the anticipated audiences of the future. The mere presence of the camera not only heightens the performative aspects of the games, but also turns everyday activities into a theatrical awareness of being watched. Special events such as days out at the beach are therefore perfect material for the intrusive gaze of the camera, no matter how friendly and familiar the person who operates it is.

Ten years later in 1948, the Edinburgh Cine Society arranged to meet up with the relatively nearby Carlisle Cine Society. A record of this event, *Thistle Meets Rose* (1948, 9.10 mins, b&w/silent), filmed by Edinburgh Cine Society member John O'Russel, offers images of this community exchange and networking opportunity. The sense that this is a special occasion in which people make more effort in order to give a good impression is evident in the formal dress of the participants. Various men in suits and bow ties line up for the benefit of the camera at the beginning of the day, before setting off in their cars. The rendezvous point is in the Borders, half way between the headquarters of both cine clubs. Once they have arrived the cars and catering caravans are parked, while the adults and especially the children enjoy the open spaces and sea air. The concern for health and fitness is encouraging these city dwellers to pack up and head to the country for the day. The escape from industrial society and the city crowds is, in effect, remedied by enjoying the relief from these metropolitan induced pressures.

By meeting up with other cine-clubs, the more serious members have an opportunity to enjoy the company of similarly minded enthusiasts, while also swapping stories and offering advice about future productions. However, like *Edinburgh Cine Society Outing to Sougall Bay*, the most notable absence from this film is that there are no images of any film related activity. These outings, while they are organised by the cine-clubs, were not intended to provide an opportunity for collaboration between cine clubs, as might have been expected. They were not meeting up to make a film, but instead just meeting up to enjoy the day out for its own sake. While there may have been some form of film-related activity during the day's events, what is important to note is that this was omitted either during the filming or editing decision making process. From a purely practical perspective, this would be a result of the camera being used to make a film, rather than to record the people as they made it. Usually only one camera would be available, so images of amateur filmmakers in production situations tend to be rare, unless

of course it is between takes or at the end of the days filming. These were times when the camera became a part of the fun, rather than a functional piece of equipment.

Films that did include production activity as part of the programme, such as *B.F.I Summer School* (1949, 14 mins, b&w, silent) and *Film-making At Crieff* (1969, 5 mins, colour/sound) also excise the work elements, in favour of leisure pursuits. In *Thistle Meets Rose*, the focus of the cameras attention was taken up with filming the participants and their children sitting in small groups enjoying a picnic and the nice weather. The absence of any work or serious leisure from these films is revealing of the amateur culture that they clearly saw themselves as part of. While no film related activity is preserved, the labour of the women in preparing the group picnic and subsequently washing up is. This perhaps reflects a desire to acknowledge the part played by these people in cine-club life as a whole. Symmetry of construction is achieved by concluding the film with the members once again waving to the camera, before getting in their cars and driving home into the horizon.

Both of the films under discussion are more records than actual films. Structurally they are effectively diary films, in which the camera in used to not to enact pre-planned sequences, but to record themselves and their friends for posterity. These events become special not for what was involved, but for *who* was there: getting involved and taking part in the events. Therefore, the films reflect the attitude of these participants towards the activities. Rather than a planned film about the day out, they are instead a record of what Richard Chalfen refers to as 'spontaneous' film activity (1987: 52).

Stylistically, the connection to films made within the home mode is also evident in the fact that most of these clubs films are silent. The aims and ambitions of most of these films mean a soundtrack is not entirely necessary to fulfil its function. This has many parallels with other artistic practices, but one of which that I want to focus on now is in relation to still photography. I argued earlier that filmmakers working with the amateur art cinema made films

that were the expression of a Kantian taste. The opposite of this Kantian taste, Pierre Bourdieu

argues, is barbarous taste. This he defines as follows:

> The popular aesthetic expressed in photographic production or with
> regard to photographs is the opposite of a Kantian aesthetic; it
> always subordinates the production and use of the image and the
> image itself to social functions (Bourdieu, et al 1996 : vi).

This subordination of image to social functions is exactly what is happening with the club films

that have been described above. The impulse to craft the perfect shots and sequences is

replaced by the desire to merely record what is spontaneously happening in front of the

camera. However, it should be noted that this spectrum of taste is not mutually exclusive: the

same filmmaker can simultaneously hold the Kantian taste for his more serious artistic

endeavours, while also showing barbarous taste in their approach to unplanned films. Enrico

Cocozza for example, could simultaneously make *Fantasmagoria* (1949) and *Fantasmagoria*

*Crazy Gang on Estate and at Fair and at Popinjay* (1949-50, 21 mins, b& w/silent): two films

that are identical in terms of location and the people involved, but aesthetically they are worlds

apart. The contrast between these two films demonstrates the gulf between serious leisure and

the hobbyist, illustrating that one person can bridge these two extremes in the course of one

day. The divide between Kantian and barbarous taste is therefore influenced by the intentions

behind the film, an issue that will be explored in the last section of this case study.

What is clear is that in contrast to the generic practices analysed in other chapters of

this thesis, club film such as these are not created at the suggestion of the manuals or journals.

There appears to be no agreed view on how to make the ideal club film. This particular genre

seems to have instead driven by the wishes of the amateur filmmakers themselves. This is

evident in films that the Edinburgh Cine Society made on the side of its more planned group

productions, for example the filmed records of the renovation of the club premises. As

longtime member Norman Speirs wrote, 'Our film of the reconstruction, the removal downstairs and our inaugural party was given the title: "Upstairs, Downstairs" (naturally!), and our address became 23A Fettes Row, as it is today.' (Speirs 1996: 7) The subsequent visit of the Queen Mother to open the completed work in 1975 was also documented, '...she visited or clubrooms, to be shown round by our President, the late Frank Walker, and signed our vistors' book. Naturally, everything was recorded on film- this time in 16mm colour.' (7) These films offer a reflexive view of the history of the club, created by the members themselves. Also as an adjunct to their film, *Seven Ages* (1957), which will be explored in chapter six, the Edinburgh Cine Society made a filmed record entitled *The Gala Premiere of Seven Ages* (1969, 8 mins, colour/silent). This film is largely an attempt to create a moving visual document of all the people who attended the premiere of *Seven Ages* that was held on the clubs premises. Largely shot from a relatively high camera position, the camera films various members and guests as they arrive in their formal dress; some men in kilts but most in suits, while the women's fashion choices give the premiere a sense of occasion. Once they make their way to the clubroom the guests, including Frank Marshall, were offered a drink and some food was laid out on a table for them to consume at their own pace. There is a palpable sense from their body language that most of these gathered invitees know each other. The mostly middle-class social status of the people involved in this cine society is clear from this film, demonstrating that at the time, this was a leisure pursuit for professionals. They chat away in small groups, while the film cuts back and fore between this, people arriving and club members encouraging people to have more food and drink. Towards the end of the film the guests are ushered into the small club cinema for the main event of the evening and a man gets up to introduce the screening. Just as their fictional film experience begins, this particular diary film ends. As a companion piece to the more planned production of *Seven Ages*, this non-fiction counterpart offers an invaluable insight into the exhibition history of amateur cinema. While production histories of

the amateur cine movement can be recovered from the amateur film journals, exhibition histories can similarly be reconstructed through a film such as *The Gala Premiere of Seven Ages*. In this way, they point towards the constant awareness that all amateur filmmakers have of where certain kinds of films are likely to be seen by an audience. In effect, they tailor their films for this imagined future audience.

## Holding a Mirror up to the Members

While the previous section of this short case study focused on the production of club films, attention is now shifted to the other factor in Bourdieu's succinct definition of barbarous taste: the *use* of these films. The main point here is that structurally and formally these club films may resemble home movies, but crucially they were not consumed within the domestic space. Rather these formal characteristics were subordinated to the 'social functions' of the club environment, which essentially meant holding up an affectionate mirror to the club members themselves. As Melissa Stone notes:

> Members know while shooting and editing that an interested audience awaits their finished piece. Unlike non-affiliated independent filmmakers, amateur film club members are assured an outlet for their projects (Stone 2003: 221).

This observation was written with the more planned amateur film productions in mind, yet it also applies to these more informally produced club films. The main practical benefit of cine-club culture from the filmmaker's point of view was the pooled funds to buy their own equipment, allowing people who could not afford to individually purchase these items to participate in film production. Thus individuals pooled together to produce films that they could not possibly make on their own. Yet these films were not made in such groups. Instead

they were often the work of a member if the club acting as a temporary lone worker. Here they took a small step back from their role as a member, to record their friends at play, temporarily imagining that they are not also part of the crowd. These films may aspire to an anthropological gaze at the assembled participants, but as their friends turn and smile to acknowledge the filmmaker's presence, the fact that this is in effect an insider's view of club life cannot be escaped. Partially, they wave to their future selves at a later party or club meeting in which this film will be shown to its ideal and intended audience; the people featured in the film itself. This filmic loop is then complete.

*Conclusion*

Viewing the social events and smiling faces in these club films raises the question of why cine clubs had such a rapid decline in popularity during the late 1960s and 1970s? Many reasons have been identified including: film schools and film being taught in humanities departments of universities ('There is a strong, yet uncorroborated, correlation between the rise of film schools and American universities offering courses in film and the dissolution of the US amateur film club network.' (Stone 2003: 221)); developments in technology including super-8 and later camcorders; and also the simple fact that young filmmakers grew older and had more responsibilities and had less time for leisure activities. All of these factors have some validity, but the increased popularity of television during the late 1950s is surely key. This medium eventually usurped the role of film societies in the screening of classic cinema. The subsequent decline in the Film Society movement therefore precipitated a symbiotic decline in the fortunes of those members interested in production.

However, the visions of community life in these club films can be questioned. Some questions follow from this: how typical are these club films? Do these films present an accurate

image of how it was to be a member of these cine clubs? Early observations suggest that films such as *Edinburgh Cine Society Outing to Sougall Bay* (1938), *Thistle Meets Rose* (1948) and *The Gala Premiere of Seven Ages* (1969) represent only a selective image of community life within these clubs. Only certain kinds of cine-clubs activity were chosen to be recorded, precisely those events which were a-typical. This left the vast amount of the club life to take place away from the view of the amateur cameraman. While the barbarous taste employed by these filmmakers may be indifferent to form, it tended to be very specific about its subject matter.

## (4:3) Amateur Newsreels: The Dawn Cine Group

### *Introduction*

This case study aims to consider films that are *agitational* in nature. They often aim to present an alternative perspective on matters of public interest, in this way they can be understood as a counter-cinema to tendencies dominant in other spheres; i.e. sponsored and mainstream amateur practices. Politically aligned collectives, who were also active in the film society movement, often made these films. While these collectives were active throughout Britain, I want to focus on a Glasgow based cine-club, the Dawn Cine Group. Attention to historical and political contexts, along with close analysis of the films they produced, will allow us to assess the 'alternative' nature of their political engagement and film practice.

The Dawn Cine Group was the production wing of the Clydeside Film Society, and their films were nothing if not politically provocative. The name of the cine-club itself suggests a new beginning, a new start. Linked to the Clydeside Film Society, the production base of its operation recruited from and catered to this exhibition outlet. The Clydeside Film Society provided an 'artistic' cover for the agitational activities that were mounted and commemorated

by its production wing. For a period of around eight years, they produced a small burst of production and exhibition activity that proved unsustainable in the long run. They initially made numerous newsreels of working class life in Glasgow, mostly focusing on parades and workers weekends/holidays. Films such as *Let Glasgow Flourish* (1952/56) and *Visit to Soviet Union* (1959-60) could be made, while the appreciation side of the operation catered to a more politically liberal celebration of classics of world cinema, albeit with a preference for works from the Soviet, Eastern European and South American artistic traditions; for example the films shown on a Sunday at the Cosmo Cinema on the 26th of December 1954 consisted of: *Council of the Gods* (Germany, 1950), *The Eagle's Track* (Poland, 1953), *Christmas Carol* (Czechoslovakia, 1947), *Sunday by the Sea* (U.K, 1953) and *It Happened in the North* (U.S.S.R, 1953). From their prospectus for Fourth Season 1954-1955:

> The Society is non-political and non-profitmaking and exhibits films from all over the world for the purpose of spreading knowledge of the life, work and culture of all peoples and to promote an atmosphere of understanding and goodwill. The study and appreciation of films is also fostered at special meetings from time to time.[28]

While advertising themselves as a society that was interested in art not politics, it should be noted that this was one of the requirements to be a member of the Federation of Film Societies: they could not afford to be seen as politically radical. The Clydeside Film Society was one of a handful of workers film societies in Glasgow during the 1950s. They offered a reduced rate of membership for people on low incomes. However, while the exhibition side could claim towards being cutting edge, the same could not be said for members of The Dawn Cine Group; they were essentially an anachronism, operating in Glasgow during the 1950s, modelling themselves and referred back to an earlier alliance of political commitment and filmmaking

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[28] From the Dawn Cine Group papers, Scottish Screen Archive.

that took place in the city twenty years before. One film in particular, their first in fact, has been canonised as representing their most important contribution to post-war amateur filmmaking. As Melissa Stewart (a researcher based at the Scottish Screen archive) has noted:

> The most successful Dawn Production was *Let Glasgow Flourish* (1956) highlighting the overcrowded, unsanitary conditions of Glasgow's inner city slum. For the first time, this film portrayed the reality of Glasgow' housing crisis from the perspective of the inhabitants, as opposed to the optimistic propaganda films released by Glasgow Corporation's Housing Committee.[29]

I want to devote the beginning of this chapter to understanding why this film has been seen as so successful, and is probably the most written about amateur film made in Scotland (Allen 1996 & Hogenkamp 2000: 18-19). A cultural value has attached itself to this film due to its apparent subversive credentials, but I want to ask whether this vision of *Let Glasgow Flourish* as an alternative perspective is really justified? However, the exclusive focus on this film, means that other films produced by the Dawn Cine Group during the 1950s have been left off the critical agenda. Therefore, this case study closes with an analysis of the amateur newsreel: a genre of filmmaking that the group returned to again and again.

As has been previously noted, it is only possible to understand *Let Glasgow Flourish*, if you understand the context of its production and what kind of filmmaking it was seen as reacting against. For these reasons I think it is appropriate to devote some space to the films on the post-war housing problem in Glasgow that were commissioned by the council.

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[29] From Scottish Screen biographies of major filmmakers.

After World War Two, Glasgow was facing a housing crisis. On the one hand demand for housing was growing fast, as people from rural areas moved to the city to fill labour gaps in an expanding industrial network of businesses. Glasgow came to be known as the Second City of the Empire and the shipbuilding on the River Clyde became synonymous with its image as a place of major industrial activity. On the other hand however, many houses had been destroyed during the war and the inner city tenements were overcrowded and unhealthy to live in. The tension between these two forces: growing industry, yet lack of housing, was one of the most serious problems facing the Glasgow City Council (Johnstone 1993). In many cities this problem might have been partially solved by encouraging low cost housing to be built by the private sector. However, in Glasgow, this burden was taken on almost single-handedly by the state, as part of a huge refinement of the role of government in the years following the Second World War, which included the nationalisation of the railways, mines and power companies, as well as the establishment of the National Health Service.

The city council, known as the Corporation of the City of Glasgow, commissioned a report into this situation. Written by Robert Bruce, a city engineer, the resulting document, The Bruce Report of 1945 (Clyde Valley Plan), recommended an extensive programme of building many high-rise flats on the outskirts of the city to house the mainly working class population in desperate need of housing. The Corporation acknowledged that the city would require a minimum of 100,000 new houses to meet the needs of the population. New towns such as East Kilbride were seen as the answer to this huge problem. Extensive planning by the state, in the

form of a massive intervention into the housing issue, was seen as the best possible solution to the perceived disasters of the unplanned city.[30]

The reasons behind these policies are outlined with clarity in a film made a year after the Bruce Report. Commissioned by the Corporation of Glasgow Housing Department, *Progress Report* (1946, 11 mins, b&w/sound) clearly outlines the problems facing Glasgow. Made by Thames and Clyde Film Productions (a Glasgow-based company founded by Stanley Russell, who was a founder member of the Meteor film group which organised the first Scottish Amateur Film Festival in 1933) this eleven minute black and white sound film provides an overview of the council's plans to remedy this situation by building new *temporary* houses in Knightswood, Cranhill, Pollok and Tollcross.[31] This is seen as a practical short-term measure that is necessary while long-term plans are drawn up and implemented. Various maps of Glasgow's present situation are contrasted with plans for the future. The benefits of prefabricated housing and steel houses are outlined. The optimism that the state can ultimately bring this crisis to an end is palpable. The film concludes with the narrator quoting the city motto, 'Let Glasgow Flourish!' he says with conviction.

A second film, *Progress Report No.2* (1948, 9.5 mins, b&w/sound) was made two years later by the same company to update the citizens of Glasgow on the progress being made on the situation. What is significant about this ten-minute film is that a contrast is made between the inner city slums and the new semi-detached houses that have been built in the last couple of years. The film also shows the dilapidated buildings and the constant levels of soot that are a feature of living in that area. This is contrasted with the new world of suburban living in the newly built semi-detached council housing in Pollok and Milton. These areas are full of trees and are surrounded by open space and clean air. A family are shown settling into their new

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[30] This was a controversial issue in post-war Britain. F.A Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*, published in 1944, took issue with massive state intervention. See especially chapters four and five, 'The "Inevitably" of Planning' and 'Planning and Democracy'.

[31] The Dawn Cine Group also made sponsored films, including a film for the education department and one for the Labour Party, *Into Action*, featuring a young John Smith, future Labour party leader.

home where each bedroom has its own built-in wardrobe. There are also sites reserved for shops, schools and cinemas. The film concludes with shots of architects and planners at work in the council buildings, which are intended to reassure Glaswegians that their future is in good, benevolent hands.

The contrast between the slum areas and the beautiful new houses that are in the process of being constructed is also featured in *Glasgow Today and Tomorrow* (1949, 8 mins, b&w/silent). This was the first of a series of films made in 1949, which included *Glasgow Our City* (1949), *Our Homes* (1949) and *Our City* (1949) made to tie in with an exhibition that shared the title *Glasgow Today and Tomorrow*, which was being held in Kelvin Hall that year (Beaton 1957). These films were made by various companies: *Glasgow Today and Tomorrow* was made by London based Moviegram Films, *Glasgow Our City* was produced by Campbell-Harper Films, while *Our Homes* and *Our City* were again Thames and Clyde works. This hiring out of work to various companies who specialised in sponsored film production reflected the short time scale and huge preparation the exhibition required. They all in fact reproduce sequences found in the earlier *Progress Report No. 1&2*. For instance, *Glasgow Today and Tomorrow* also attempts a contrast between the inner city slums and the new housing developments pursued by the council. It is evident that this production was working with a higher budget as can be seen from the aerial shots of Glasgow city centre that open the film. However, since the purpose here was to illustrate the Corporation of Glasgow's plans *in general*, this film more effectively contextualises the plans for housing development in combination with new motorway inner and outer ring roads and the construction of the Clyde Tunnel, so that industry can bypass the city centre where the main bridges are grouped together. Factories are apparently outmoded and congested, so development of an industrial estate is seen as a necessary step to encourage industrial expansion. On the housing front, a short dramatic reconstruction serves to make the point. This sequence depicts a man and his

wife in a tenement, which the commentary tells us is less than ten minutes from the city centre, who live in a small room with their three children. Like *Progress Report*, the benefits of living in planned environments away from the city centre are stressed; they provide 'more breathing space' and 'modern planning does more than just provide houses, it builds community areas with schools...' All of this rhetoric is firmly focused on the future. The past is seen as only fit to leave behind. The film concludes with the narrator proclaiming the council's desire 'to make Glasgow of today a new and better Glasgow of tomorrow'. The emphasis here is not on remembering, but on forgetting and moving on. The title card 'The End' is superimposed over the city logo in which the motto 'Let Glasgow Flourish' is clearly visible. Both *Glasgow Our City* and *Our City, Today and Tomorrow* continue on the same vein. All feature architect's models of plans for the future with tall housing developments which are reminiscent of the city in *Metropolis* (1927). *Our City, Today and Tomorrow* warns at the beginning and end of the film that 'the future of Glasgow is in your hands', which alludes to the fact that the people who are making these plans are officials, but ironically highlights the real power of the decision makers; the future of Glasgow is heavily dependant on official civic institutions in such a highly planned economy as post war Britain. The film constantly cuts back to shots of a hand turning the pages of the Bruce Report and then cuts to the real effects of these ideas. The power of these words will be considerable.

The film *Our Homes* (1949, 14.5 mins, b&w/silent) more specifically deals with the problems of housing. It begins with footage of a child from a tenement building who has a pet rabbit. An analogy between tenement dwellers and confined animals is made when the narration points out that 'to be healthy and happy, human beings, just like rabbits, need lots of space, light and air'. The irony of moving vast numbers of people to live in huge tower blocks is however not explored. The film then moves to the more general level of policy: 'the housing department is the largest single house-providing agency in Scotland. It owns almost a quarter

of the houses in the city'. This is a promotional film for the Corporation of Glasgow as much as it is about plans for housing development. Again, like the other films made that year *Our Homes* concludes with the statement, 'largely as a result of the Housing Department's activities, Glasgow of tomorrow will be a very different city from Glasgow of to-day.' The planners and the city council employ a rhetoric that eerily echoes that of the avant-garde. They want to leave behind the traditional architecture of the past and move towards implementing a modernist architecture of 'the future'. Post war architects were heavily influenced by Le Corbusier's utilitarianism that claimed, 'a house is a machine for living in'. This meant that aesthetic issues were downplayed in favour of housing that was merely functional. Over time, this style was either attacked as proof of a modernist lack of humanism, or celebrated as examples of the benefits of the post war welfare state. What is clear from this survey of sponsored films on the housing issue is while these works do display an optimistic vision of the benefits of centralised planning, they also acknowledge the existence of the inner city slums. The debate around these films is not as clear-cut as it first seemed. Now a consideration of the Dawn Cine Groups' reply to these films is necessary to reach some firm conclusions.

*A Commemoration of the Past: The Amateur Response*

In 1951, the Conservative party won the national elections with a commitment to build 300,000 houses a year, while the Progressive Party (an alliance of Conservatives and Liberals) won control of the Corporation of Glasgow in May. By 1952 the Corporation proposed to sell 622 newly built houses on Merrylee Road, on the south side of the city. No local council in Britain, before this case, had ever suggested the sale of council houses. People on the council waiting list were eligible to apply to buy, but the Labour Party in Glasgow made opposition to this sale a major issue of their campaign. In the run up to the election, many strikes were called by trade

unions representing industrial workers and a demonstration was held in George Square on the 6th of December. Charles Bukelis filmed some of the workers marches with his 16mm camera.

The impetus behind the making of *Let Glasgow Flourish* (1952-56, 16 mins, b&w/silent) was as reaction to the council films made in the 1940s and was also inspired by the controversy surrounding the proposed sale of the Merrylee Road houses. The title was either an ironic aside on the optimism of the Glasgow motto or it is suggesting that Glasgow can only truly flourish under leadership from left-wing political parties. The film itself is a mixture of fiction and non-fiction that is typical of avant-garde films of the 1930s such as *Peace and Plenty* (U.K, 1939).

The film opens with a title card outlining the circumstances behind the sale of the Marylee Road houses. Then dramatised scenes involving a family in a tenement flat are played out in the social realist style reminiscent of *Chicks Day* (1951) (which was discussed in the second chapter). This is contrasted through the use of parallel montage with how 'the other half live' in the West End of the city. This technique common in professional silent film is appropriated in this amateur production. However, the compare and contrast model between the slums and luxury living in another part of the city was also part of the structure of *Progress Report No. 2* and *Glasgow, Today and Tomorrow*; what has changed is the implications drawn from such a contrast. While in the sponsored films, the new housing developments are a source of hope for the future, here the expensive housing is the object of resentment. The way of life of the middle and upper classes was, to many, beyond the aspirations of even the most optimistic socialists. Walks in Kelvingrove Park, which are available to everyone regardless of socio-economic status, are made (through creative editing) to take on connotations of bourgeois privilege. Children playing in the park are contrasted with children playing on the road. Here is the crux of the argument being put forward by the film.

While playing ball games on this road, one youngster from the tenements is hit by a car. This highly emotive (and some might say highly manipulative) dramatised scene illustrates

what the Dawn Cine Group members see as the social problem the film is designed to illustrate. Dramatisation was also used in *Glasgow, Today and Tomorrow*, but here the implications are more cutting. Inadequate housing with no nearby leisure facilities effectively means that young innocent children will pay the price with their lives. The offspring of the exploited are helpless in this situation. This predicament is then linked, by sleight of hand, to the sale of council houses in Merrylee Road.

Footage shot by Charles Bukelis in 1952 of the trade union protest marches then makes up the rest of the film. This non-fiction documentary record was made to function as the answer to the issue raised above. Political change is what is necessary to remedy the appalling situation of working class people having to survive in such conditions. The most effective creative choice in this production is arguably what follows. Drawing inspiration from the overt symbolism typical of the Soviet montage films of the 1920s, the Dawn Cine Group show the coat hangers for the most senior civil servants in the Glasgow City Council as being made up of top hats. This item of clothing functions as a metonym for the council being run by the upper class, who by implication are not interested in the problems of the working poor. The film goes on to show party members trying to persuade the public to vote Labour. The conclusion of the drama is a headline from a newspaper announcing the victory, 'Labour sweeps the polls', as indeed it did at the Municipal elections on the 7th of May. Then it cuts back to the coat hanger once again. This time however flat caps (the contemporary symbol of the working class man) replace the top hats of the bourgeois.

The didactic quality of *Let Glasgow Flourish* is highlighted during an epilogue in which the camera pans slowly down a blackboard that reads:

> There are 90,000 people on the waiting list for houses in Glasgow;
> ten people are killed or injured every day in street accidents.
> In 1951 the Town Council proposed to sell 662 newly-built houses in
> the Merrylee district. This aroused among the people of Glasgow a

storm of protest that swept the council from office at the next election. Our film deals with some of these victims of overcrowded streets and housing and shows how they won the fight against the sale of the Merrylee houses.

The film then positions itself as an activist lesson on the powers of political protest, which is very different from using film as an means of promoting a political agenda in the run-up to an election. *Let Glasgow Flourish* (1952-56) was premiered at an 'Amateur Night' organised by the Clydeside Film Society and held at Rowans Smoke Room in Buchanan Street on the 23rd of January 1957. Also on the bill was 'Mr J.M Roy's *A Car For the Old Folk*. Made in colour it deals with welfare work in Milngavie in the form of a story played by a cast of enthusiastic children.' *Let Glasgow Flourish* was in production for four years, a much longer time than any of the other Dawn Cine Group films. This is significant because this film, despite the rhetoric that surrounds it, was not made to influence directly the political process in 1952. Instead it functions in a process of remembering the political events of 1952 for an audience (who were perhaps involved in the struggle) looking back in 1956. Therefore *Let Glasgow Flourish* essentially functions as a teleological record of political victory. In contrast to the sponsored films on housing, *Let Glasgow Flourish* looks back to the victories of the past, not ahead to the problems and possible solutions for the future.

*Amateurs and Newsreels*

Despite the relative lack of output, there has nevertheless been considerable critical interest in socialist filmmaking from historians since the 1980s. In the context of British cinema, Don MacPherson's edited collection of essays *British Cinema: Traditions of Independence* (1980) along with Bert Hogenkamp's *Deadly Parallels: Film and the Left in Britain, 1929-1939* (1986) has defined the field. At a more local-level, the work of Doug Allen on Glasgow in the

1930s (Allen 1982: 93-99) is even more relevant. The research carried out by scholars on this particular movement is worth noting, as other forms of amateur film have not been as equally well served. The focus on the 1930s in both of these studies in particular is especially telling, as this is often seen as the high point of agitation in the cinema.

Such films as *Glasgow May Day* (1937) and *Challenge to Fascism* (1938) have been deemed historically important enough to be written about and discussed theoretically by various writers (MacPherson 1980). Amateur newsreels *News Magazine: Daily Worker Outing* (1951-56) and *Procession in Commemoration of Calton Weavers/ Robert Smillie Centenary* (1957) have also recently been discussed (Allen 1996). When looked at in detail, these films pose many interesting historical questions for the researcher. The precursors to The Dawn Cine Group, such as the Kino Group and the Glasgow Clarion Film Society of the 1930s, made films surprisingly similar to the films from the 1950s. Essentially they can be described as amateur newsreels, or rather amateur *counter*-newsreels. While official government bodies of the 1930s such as John Grierson's GPO unit made newsreels that tended to focus on social democratic visions of Britain, these agitational groups turned their cameras on to aspects of community and public life ignored or dismissed by mainstream media practices. They consciously aimed to represent an alternative vision of politics; one more closely aligned with the vision of Lenin or Stalin rather than establishment figures such as Neville Chamberlain. The characteristics of worker's newsreels in comparison with the official newsreels, can be summarised on the following table of oppositions:


OFFICIAL NEWSREELS vs. WORKERS NEWSREELS


WEEKLY---OCCASIONAL
SOUND---SILENT
35MM---16MM
USE OF TRIPOD---HAND HELD
MONARCHY---WORKING CLASS
MILITARY AFFAIRS---INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

SPORT---NON-COMPETITIVE LESUIRE
MASS AUDIENCE---RESTRICTED AUDIENCE
OFFICIAL CO-OPERATION---POLICE HARASSMENT

On a stylistic level, what is surprising given that these films were made to be shown to community based audiences, is how much they look like a home movies. The camera is often unsteady, the editing is rough and there is little evidence of much planning having gone into making these films look 'polished'. The main explanation for this surprising lack of 'good' technique at this level of organised film production seems to be the short production schedule (news has to be of recent events by definition) and the shortage of funds to invest in expensive cameras and editing facilities. Therefore, the technique may be below par but the intention to challenge the status quo was always dominant in newsreel productions. This stylistic naiveté seems to be consistent with the newsreels made in Glasgow from the 1930s.

For instance, a film such as *Glasgow May Day* (1937, 15 mins, b&w/silent) focuses on the Glasgow Clarion Film Society itself and its participation in the May Day parades of that year. The film opens on shots of members leaving the party headquarters in Wellington Street and follows them as they meet up with other groups as they march past George Square. Support for workers in the struggles of the Spanish Civil War is a dominant theme of many of the banners and floats that pass the camera. Societies from all over Glasgow participated in the events of that year including Partick D.L.P, Govan Socialist Sunday School and the Scottish Socialist Party along with trade unions representing various industries and public services. This commemoration of public protest takes on a strangely *narcissistic* quality that seems especially hermetic and isolated from the world events they are referencing. This focus on filming themselves can also be seen in the films they made of various worker's holiday weekends that were popular at the time. A film made by Sam Drysdale, *Lomond MC/ Ski-ing* (1939) is a good example of this tendency. He was a member of the Lomond Mountaineer Club (one of several workers "weekenders" clubs) who aimed to improve the health of industrial workers by

advocating weekend trips to the countryside. The workers are filmed enjoying mountain walks, ski-ing and setting up camp. The Proletarian Film Guild also carried out a similar activity in their film *May Day Parades* (1937-40). In this film as well as footage of James Maxton speaking to a crowd in George Square, there are also shots of members of the Unemployed Workers Movement on Sunday Schools outings such as picnics. The emphasis on leisure time is in keeping with the use of 16mm cameras in the private lives of the rich of the time. Stylistically this is a community film of public life to be shown at meetings in halls around Glasgow. It also anticipates the exploration of this crucial political issue and the transition from the six-day working week to the current five-day version, a subject explored in Humphrey Jennings's *Spare Time* (U.K, 1939).

Twenty years later the same concerns are in evidence in the films made by The Dawn Cine Group. A film such as *News Magazine: Daily Worker Outing* is like a compilation of the various activities and interests that a socialist group would be involved in. It is what Andrew Buchanan described as a 'cine magazine', moving from topic to topic: from a visit to Karl Marx's tomb in Highgate Cemetery, to the Gorbals tenant's rent protest on to a band-stand in Kelvingrove Park. The film presents a collage of the political life of Glasgow at the time; it is the filmed equivalent of a diary or time capsule to be passed onto the next generation as an example of the political life in action.

Likewise, *Procession in Commemoration of the Calton Weavers/ And Robert Smillie Centenary* focuses the continuing urge to *remember*, a desire to acknowledge the people who were seen to have fought for the issues that the current generation inherits. The later film was made to document 'the renaming of Larkhall Park in honour of the mining leader Robert Smillie'. However more controversial is The Dawn Cine Group film *Visit to the Soviet Union* (1950-60, 5 mins, b&w/silent). This trip during the Cold War functions as a provocative political statement about the relationship between Britain and the USSR at a time when

anxieties were a serious and a tangible part of everyday life. There is evidence to suggest that the Soviet Union in fact paid for foreign delegations such as The Dawn Cine Group to visit the Soviet Union for the express purposes of de-mystifying the Communist way of life.[32] In exchange for the funds to travel and the permission to enter the country they would make a film sympathetic to the U.S.S.R. So, despite the disastrous policies the Soviet government were pursuing during the 1950s, The Dawn Cine Group made a short film about traditional Russian dancing. This highly selective view of the country at the time would have pleased the Soviets and also the members of the socialist film societies who were the intended audience of this material. They would see this footage as proof of the distorting impact of the official newsreels made in Britain at the time. The images were intended to humanise the population of the U.S.S.R at a time when their governments were ready for conflict. The contented and happy faces of the Russian peasants were used as a propaganda tool. However, at the same time an acknowledgement of the causalities of past wars is made at the beginning of *Visit to Soviet Union* when both the locals and the visitors from Glasgow line up to pay their respects to the fallen. The desire to commemorate is once again strong.

## Conclusion

The Dawn Cine Group's most famous film, *Let Glasgow Flourish*, educates the viewer about the housing reforms that are an important part of Glasgow's past, something that is evident from the recently launched web site dedicated to this issue that can be accessed at: http://www.bestlaidschemes.com. This project was partly funded by Scottish Screen and features a section named 'Movie Zone' which outlines the historical context of The Bruce Plan and also allows the general public access to the films I have discussed in this chapter and many

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[32] See Trevor Ryan's article 'Film and Political Originations in Britain 1929-39' in *Traditions of Independence*, pp. 54, for further details of these trips.

more. This kind of project will facilitate more engagement with these films that have remained stored away for many years. However, the consideration of the amateur newsreels examined towards the end of this case study suggests that the Dawn Cine Group should be re-positioned within the wider tendencies of amateur cinema, rather than the avant-garde or independent film traditions, as has been the case up until now. The films produced under the collective banner of the 'Dawn Cine Group' allow us a special glimpse at the community structure of these political activists, in a way that is in surprising keeping with the leisure activities of the Edinburgh Cine Society. These two case studies have raised a number of issues that should be developed further.

(4:4) Academic Discourse on Community

*From Symbolic Families to Symbolic Communities*

As the two case studies that have formed the basis of this chapter have shown, many amateur filmmakers chose to make films focusing on the aspects of life in their local communities. These films tend to be more interested in content than form, the optimal lifestyle receiving priority over film production, in tendencies that conform to Bourdieu's notion of 'barbarous taste'. Moreover while offering a visual record of numerous community events, they nonetheless rarely have an accompanying soundtrack to explain what is happening on screen. This lack of a soundtrack may frustrate researchers of this material, but, seen in context, it has become clear that informal verbal participation during exhibition was essential yet ultimately ephemeral activity. The supplementary information that could have been preserved for future viewers is now lost, and can only now be reconstructed by interviews with participants. This informal verbal participation will be contrasted with the more formal verbal 'fixing' that will

be explored in the next chapter in relation to film and memory. By contrast the community films explored in this chapter now find themselves divorced from their relationship with contemporary events. In attempting to explain this relationship between visual records and verbal ephemera, in this conclusion I will turn to the work of Richard Chalfen. For example, in a paper addressing issues of family photography, his student Christopher Musello notes, 'The use of the home mode seems heavily reliant on verbal accompaniment for the transmission of personal significances.' (Musello 1980: 39) Similarly, these community films were based on a similar premise: the 'raw' footage presented would be easily understood by people who were part of this group, yet be relatively meaningless to 'outsiders'. Yet, once again it must be remembered that here we are not dealing with private material produced for the home mode, but semi-public films enjoyed within the confines of the restricted mode. However, this material is much more exclusive than the films explored in the chapters two and three: here there is a palpable sense that these film were for a select few individuals only, rather than a wider film festival audience. This process resulted, as we have seen, in a selective view of life as part of community groups: one that projected idealised images back onto its participants. Therefore, in the conclusion that follows, I aim to reformulate Richard Chalfen's theory of 'symbolic' representations, from outside the private sphere, onto the level of the wider community.

## *Collective Identities*

This tendency towards community films has been noted by some observers, but not sufficiently theorised. For example, Jeffrey K. Ruoff, in his previously mentioned article, 'Home Movies of the Avant-Garde: Jonas Mekas and the New York Art World', explicitly evokes the comforts of community life in his exploration of the reasons behind Jonas Mekas' intense

involvement in the New York art scene, and his desire to record these events as they unfolded using his own cine camera. Ruoff notes that '...his home movies are produced by, for, and about the avant-garde community; they document not his domestic or family life but the New York art world.' (Ruoff 1992: 295) However, if they did not document his domestic or family life, is it still appropriate to label them 'home movies'? I would suggest that this tendency to refer to films that lack aesthetic polish as 'home movies' has been misleading and needs to be corrected. As Richard Chalfen observed:

> The "primitive" and "inexperienced" qualities of movies made by novice filmmakers provokes a categorical reduction to the "home movie" status. However, social characteristics used to define home mode genres easily distinguish these products from authentic home movies (1987: 144).

While I am not suggesting that Jonas Mekas was a 'novice', it is clear that his community films were made with the express intention to be subsequently shown to a certain social network of participants in the designated art scene. This 'social characteristic', as Chalfen calls it, was to conserve and celebrate in filmic form the artistic scene that functioned as a community of sorts, in a potentially alienating metropolitan environment. Therefore, as we have seen, this drive towards community filmmaking emerges from both rural and urban environments: the desire to be part of a formation that is larger than the individual is strong no matter what geographical location a person is located in. Other film scholars have also noted the popularity of this uniquely amateur film genre around the world. Within the context of Europe, as Bert Hogenkamp and Mieke Lauwers point out, related filmic practices have tended to be labelled 'inédits' (1997: 108). This term is synonymous with the English for 'reportages', a genre that is more commonly acknowledged by film archivists than film scholars. Indeed, the archivist organisation that has done so much to further the debate around amateur film is called the European Association Inédits. This film practice aims not to enlighten a wider audience to

remote events, but to re-enforce existing social relationships among a relatively enclosed community: an *inward looking* ambition more suitable to the amateur sector than the professional industry. This very specific generic practice has most accurately been captured in a passing comment from Patricia Zimmermann. In an analysis of an American amateur fiction film made by the Wisconsin State Historical Society entitled *Study in Reds* (1927, b&w/silent), she notes:

> Following realist narrative conventions derived more from theatrical practice than cinematic language, the film is denotative in its cinematic form, with long takes and not much editing, concentrating on the characters as they operate in groups. This concentration of documentation of group activity surfaces in many amateur films that serve as a record of performances at church groups, schools, country clubs (2001: 121).

Despite the fact that here a fiction film is being analysed as if it was a film of record, the most useful aspect of this paragraph is that it seems to confirm the hypothesis underlining this chapter: namely that the community film was a popular way to represent various groups to others, but more importantly, to themselves. Zimmermann evocatively refers to as a 'cinema of collective identity' (121), a phrase that echoes John Grierson's concerns from the opening of this chapter, capturing the desire to channel social and creative energy into wider forces than was possible only with the lone individual. In a sentence that should echo throughout these concluding remarks, Richard Chalfen noted that, 'A film (or group of films) is understood as a symbolic form that is produced and viewed as part of a process of human behavior organized within social and cultural contexts.' (Chalfen 1975b: 87) Rather than seeing these community films as merely reportage or just empirical visual evidence, as has tended to be the case within archivist circles, I suggest that they should be seen a 'symbolic forms', shining light on a now defunct system of social organisation: namely the leisure culture of the early half of the century.

In the introduction to this chapter, George Sewell's article on 'The Ideal Cine-Club' demonstrated the social attitudes common amongst many members of the period. The advice on how to recruit and retain the most desirable members of the community to participate in club activity has reverberated through the case studies of the Edinburgh Cine Society and the Dawn Cine Group. In these models of voluntary social interaction and co-operation we glimpse evidence of the 'closed system of participants' in this less rigorously planned variant of non-professional film production (Chalfen 1975b: 94); i.e. the people in the films are also its eventual intended audience. Similarly, by moving focus from the home mode to the semi-public space, we have seen that while social practices (such as group outings) are highly planned, like most home moviemakers, its filmic practices that are often highly spontaneous.

Formally, as we have seen, these community films exhibit many of the same characteristics as home movies. Shooting is often unplanned and '...editing is unpopular because it does not share the social qualities that underlie the other events.' (Chalfen 1987: 55) To plan and edit are the arduous tasks of the individual, struggling to give shape to the intended original concept. Here, like the home movie, there was no such inspired creative idea: these films originated in the atmosphere of the joyous social situations and found reward in returning to a similar party situation at a later date. These largely non-critical but emotionally engaged viewers could well have judged the footage not for its technical accomplishments or creative ingenuity, but rather for its representation of life among the group. Put simply, a club film, such as those that were analysed in this chapter, might be valued more highly if it presented a positive vision of the community.

This emotional attachment to the ideal of 'community' can be traced in the writing on films of this type. For example, while discussing Jonas Mekas' community films, Jeffrey K. Ruoff notes, 'Memory thus restores the possibility of community and inscribes the individual in history, reforming the ties that bind us together.' (1992: 303) Here, the restorative power of the community in bringing meaning and purpose to the lone individual is evident. Being in such tension with the pressures of so much of modern life, this ideal is extremely fragile and is constantly under threat from various quarters. To guard against such encroachment, the imaginative power of images is just one way to preserve a feeling a kinship and commonality amongst a diverse body of individuals. The films enable a retrospective look back at what seemed like ordinary everyday events. For example, picnics at the beach preserved on film and projected back to the participants suddenly take on a life of their own, invoking selective symbolic memories of togetherness.

It is now clear that as historical evidence these community films remain negligible artefacts, of interest only to family members, friends and leisure historians. However, studies that focus on such surface detail, rather than attempting to understand the function of such material, condemn themselves to triviality. Writing on home movies, Richard Chalfen pointed out that, 'When analysing latent function, we see that the making and showing of home movies tends to act as a bonding agent creating a specific social structure.' (Chalfen 1975b: 99) Therefore, as symbolic representations, these community films similarly served an important function as bonding agents, working to keep the group together. In the end, these films were not completed works, but merely fragmentary traces of a lost leisure culture. As we have seen, these films provide a somewhat enclosed and *narcissistic* view of community life. However, a more *civic* strain of community filmmaking can be evidenced in other amateur films, a tendency that requires further research. For example the Group 5 production, *Residential Police Cadet Course* (1969, 12 mins, colour/sound), is a case in point. Interestingly, in a film

that reaches out to the life beyond the cine club, this expositional documentary on the training of police officers displays the more aesthetically polished characteristics that distinguished the filmmaking of the restricted mode. This once again re-enforces the notion that audiences beyond friends and family expected amateur filmmakers to work much harder to engage their attentions. Indeed, not all uniquely amateur generic practices were as narcissistic as the films examined in this chapter, as the next chapter suggests.

Amateur Cinema and Heritage:
Making Movies For Remembering

'Films, moreover, constitute a new and valuable kind of historical
document. They stand alone in their ability to record for all time all
kinds of action, from the most epoch-making to the most personal.'

(Lindgren 1935: 66)

In previous sections of this thesis it has been noted that there has been some tension between

the 'amateur' and notions of art and entertainment. These aspirational modes of filmmaking

existed uneasily with ideologies of amateurism. However, no such problems were encountered

with the amateur and ideas of heritage. There was a sense that by working within this

framework was to film material appropriate to the amateur mode of production. Like other

approaches to filmmaking, these discourses were disseminated in the amateur journals, in this

particular case *Home Movies and Home Talkies*.

Two articles written by Ernest Oakley and published in *Home Movie and Home

Talkies*, illustrate these issues within amateur film culture. The first 'Retain England's Folk

Lore!' published in 1932, offers an initial guide to ideas around amateur cinema and heritage.

Another article, 'Film The Dying Crafts', published seven years later in 1939, expands on these

early suggestions. Both of these articles deserve closer analysis for how they disseminate these

ideologies to the wider public that would subsequently put them into practice. The first of these

'Retain England's Folk Lore!' begins, 'The folk-lore traditionally associated with this country

of ours is slowly but surely vanishing into the past...' This warning setting the tone for the

article that followed (Oakley 1932: 195). Ernest Oakley must have wanted his article to act as a

rallying call for amateur enthusiasts. After explaining that the Golden Dawn ceremony at Stonehenge circle will be cancelled next year, he goes on to reflect:

> Surely such an obvious sign as this should awaken in the amateur cinematographer the desire to capture at least a few of these ancient and perhaps queer customs that have survived the ravages of time (195).

His article therefore rests on a simple suggestion: why not film this? Rather than train the camera at everyday family activities or community customs which everyone else is filming anyway, Oakley is proposing that a little more thought is put into choosing subjects for their film activities. Why not film this particular disappearing trade, rather than make another holiday film? The implication is that the resulting film would be of much more value and interest to future generations than more conventional subject matter. This method of prompting the amateur filmmaker to follow a certain path rather than one of their own choosing may seem odd today when people seem to resent such prescription from authority figures, but I want to argue that this intervention into cultural activity has resulted in many valuable films of record. The key line from Oakley's 1932 article is as follows, 'These rituals are to be found in practically every part of the county, and the most interesting are usually the least heard of' (195). Here, what we see is the acknowledgement of regional diversity within the national body. As a celebration of England's cultural heritage, it is not one based on cultural homogeneity, but rather on recognition of cultural differences within an overall national consensus. Retaining England's folk lore does not mean that it should be preserved unchanged by centralised authority, but that each individual should assume responsibility for preserving their own geographical areas customs on film; not only for the enjoyment of their local community but for the benefit of the whole of England:

> However, a discovery of only one of these quaint survivals and its subsequent recording repays the cinematographer for any little

trouble he may have gone to, for in time- a shorter time than you would imagine too- those shots will be most invaluable (195).

Geographical concerns are therefore inextricably linked with historical interests; they cannot be separated. The importance of regional awareness becomes more explicit as the article develops and Oakley goes on to illustrate his own knowledge of disappearing customs around England. The article then becomes a three-page list, one that does not develop on its opening themes except by repetition and building a sense of overwhelming the amateur with possibilities. Many parts of England are alluded to as Oakley casts his gaze across the land and notes, for example, the Dance of the Deer Men, which takes place on September 5th each year in Abbots Bromley and around Staffordshire. This custom consists of men from the county wearing 'gigantic antlers for their queer dances, which are performed in the highways.' (196) In a similar vein, the men of Helston, Cornwall, dress up in frock coats and top hats and dance through the main streets of the town accompanied by their women partners. This dance even continues into private homes, in a tradition that is 'said to date back to Pagan times' (196). These traditions are kept alive by being *performed* for a contemporary audience, rather than merely being described in written form. Therefore, the camera can capture these performances for posterity if they do not survive into an imagined future. Oakley also informs his readers of a subject 'which may be photographed in the next few weeks or so' in Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, Gloucestershire and Hampshire. The "mummers", men dressed in coloured paper streamers, paper hats or crowns and wielding wooden swords, make their appearance at Yuletide in a custom which aims to make allusions back to the era of medieval knights who once roamed the area. Ernest Oakley notes, 'There is plenty of action about the plays, which have been handed down from generation to generation...' a statement that draws direct connection with a sense of regional heritage being passed down through the ages (196). All three of these examples involve men dressing up and acting for an assembled crowd. Oakley

gives many other examples of local customs not involving this tendency, but I have selected

these three to demonstrate some connection and overlaps between them. These customs, while

broadly similar, are mainly valued for the unique spin each region puts on them. A desire to

allude to their particular regional past is key. This ceremony is part of a broader cultural

memory that is preserved from earlier historical eras. It is inevitably transformed by

contemporary concerns, but Oakley sees the camera as intervening in this process to freeze

these images for the record. This process is ongoing, something he notes in the conclusion to

his article:

> I have only attempted briefly to outline some of the best known
> customs still existing in the country in this short article, and should
> you decide on folk-lore filming yourself, you will find "Home
> Movie Opportunities"- a diary of events worth filming on another
> page and published monthly- of valuable assistance in discovering
> the time and place of the most interesting of those queer rites still
> remaining (197).

Therefore, *Home Movies and Home Talkies* positioned itself as a gateway to this wider cultural

past through its 'Home Movie Opportunities' column. Not only is the prescriptive nature of

amateur cine culture in full evidence, but also its *seasonal* quality is abundantly clear. The

summer was the key time to film these 'queer rites', a time of optimal lighting conditions and

the height of holiday season.

While these suggestions were published every month for the benefit of amateur

cinematographers in search of a suitable subject, it was another seven years before Ernest

Oakley wrote another article in *Home Movie and Home Talkies* on the subject. 'Film The

Dying Crafts!' published in the February issue of the journal in 1939, resembles his previous

article in many respects. Similarly, it functions as a rallying call for the amateur to make sure

they are taking full advantage of what is peculiar about their own part of the country. Its tone is

exactly the same, the exclamation mark in the title being the clearest indication of its

instructive function. Only this time Oakley is not telling the readers to film disappearing trades, but more specifically disappearing crafts. Unlike customs that can be passed from one generation to another, trades only exist as long as they satisfy a particular economic need. Towards the end of the 1930s the need to document these disappearing trades became a much higher priority than it had been even a few years earlier. The reasons for this cultural shift are explained in the opening paragraph:

> Just as beauty spots are gradually vanishing, famous and picturesque buildings giving way to more utilitarian structures, wide concrete highways levelling out the old tracks with their beautiful old bridges, so are old-world villages industries being rapidly swamped out of existence by mass-production methods (Oakley 1939: 404).

Here, the forces sweeping forces of modernity are destroying the nation's heritage; the ancient and the beautiful being replaced by the modern and the merely useful. However, this article is by no means a celebration of these forces of change but it in fact represents a mourning for a dying rural culture. The countryside is seen as respecting the traditions that have been passed on by its forefathers, while the city is the place where people go to abandon these very traditions. This opposition effectively overlooks the possibility that the city must have some dying crafts of its own.

The implied comparison between the production methods of the amateur filmmaker and the skilled craftsman is revealing of the ideological operations of the amateur cine journals. Both of these activities are seen as being performed by the artisan in the country rather than the mass industrial worker in the city. This is amateur cinema as a form of cultural *resistance* to the forces of modernity. It is an oppositional discourse but without the radical political ambitions that the term usually implies in the study of professional and avant-garde work.

Like the previous article it goes on to list a number of potential opportunities for the amateur cinematographer to consider:

> For the benefit of those readers who intend to capture at least a few of our rural industries, I have compiled a list of some of the crafts still practiced in various districts of England. While it may reveal some unknown craftsman in your own district, it may be some considerable use when visiting other counties during the coming months (404).

The seasonal nature of amateur film practice is once again re-enforced while also suggesting that this could be a subject of holiday films during the summer months. Once again, the journals are encouraging the amateur to consider civic filmmaking rather than just topics of domestic concern. These crafts were not centrally based; instead they were to be found all over the country. For example, Oakley informs the reader about a Mr James Miles, of Freemantle, near Southampton who made ladders. He had died the year before, but the 'craft is being carried on by his sons and grandson, who use the old man's ancient tools.' (405) Here family heirlooms take on a wider civic influence as their craftsmanship provided a service for the wider community. Further north near Cheltenham and Gloucester and moving down the Severn valley 'the workers still do English basketry in much the same way as when the Druids wandered through the grassy glades of the Forest of Dean.' (405) Crafts are seen to be especially important if a long-standing connection to earlier communities such as the Druids can be made. The metropolitan perspective is illustrated by the concluding paragraphs of the article:

> Burnham Beeches in Buckinghamshire is unknown to many a Londoner, although it belongs to the "Mother City," and is one of the beauty spots of England. In a richly timbered country, it is not surprising that woodwork has flourished always. Chair-making still survives as a handcraft. Wooden bowls are made of Chesham of yew, elm, cherry, and walnut. Buckingham lace only just keeps alive (406).

The tenuous existence of traditions that have 'flourished always' is revealing. It almost implies that these trades are *beyond* history. Their status as being established before written records

exist, gives them an almost mystical or transcendent meaning for English heritage. However it is clear from this paragraph that such ideas can be mobilised for more contemporary cultural and political concerns. The effort made to incorporate remote regions into the national project of the "Mother Country" is particularly notable, one that is consistent with cultural policy in Britain during the 1930s, which is demonstrated by the founding of the National Film Library in 1935. As the Librarian, E.H Lindgren noted:

> Great Britain, in particular, has an unrivalled opportunity for making and preserving film records of the daily life and ceremonial customs of the primitive and orientally-civilised peoples within her Empire. It is a responsibility which should be discharged before the disappearance of the life itself ultimately makes it impossible. One of the main purposes of the National Film Library being set up by the British Film Institute will be to preserve film of this kind (1935: 67).

So amateur films were seen as being useful in documenting concerns that would be missed by the professionals. In fact, it seems Oakley was energised to write his articles on amateur cinema and heritage because he knew that there would be a national film archive to preserve such films. Amateur cinema was therefore part of a wider national film culture project during the 1930s, one that was highly sensitive to regional variation in international contexts.

So while the writing on amateur cinema may have been centralised, the actual production of amateur cinema was far more diverse and heterogeneous than these discourses would imply. This plurality of production can be seen in the films that have been deposited in the Scottish Screen archive, films that may have been missed by the renamed National Film and Television Archive based in London. What can these films made in Scotland tell us about amateur cinema and heritage that the Ernest Oakley articles cannot? Also, going back to the Ernest Lindgren quotation at the beginning of this chapter, what *kind of* historical document do these films offer?

<u>(5:2) Posterity Productions</u>

*<u>Introduction</u>*

The existence of a number of films that can be labelled 'posterity productions' are the clearest

indication yet that amateur cinema was not always intended to be an ephemeral activity which

could be easily forgotten. These films, serious in both intent and execution, aim to transform

the unstable chemical basis of film into an artefact that has enough value to be passed on and

preserved by succeeding generations. If the dominant feature of the community films in the last

chapter was *leisure*, these films are more concerned with the *passing of time*. They were

creative explorations of the use of film to capture the passage of time on film, not just for its

own sake, but for a very exact purpose.

The earliest example of this practice in the Scottish Screen archive is *Evacuation of St*

*Kilda* (1930, 10 mins, b& w/silent). This is one of the better-known titles in the catalogue,

documenting as it does the famous moment in twentieth century Scottish history that was to be

the inspiration for the feature films *Edge of the World* (1937) and *Ill Fares the Land* (1982).

Unlike those titles, this footage was not based on recreations of past events but was filmed *as*

*the events were taking place*. However, it nevertheless invokes the same feelings of mourning

and melancholia for a way of life that will not endure. *Evacuation of St Kilda* documents island

life as it was for centuries, as the residents farm sheep, weave their own clothing and bring up

their children within a self-contained world. These scenes of a happy community reassemble

the films from the last chapter. However, disruption comes as the outside world intrudes and

the inevitable painful process of moving on has begun. The sheep are loaded onto small boats,

while the residents take one last look around at the place they have spent their entire lives and

are sometimes reluctant to be photographed. The amateur filmmaker visually maps the homes

one last time in an attempt to capture a sense of lived-in space that will soon be lost. The island is left to the penguins and the large birds that can survive in this geographically isolated area. Then we see the residents on their larger ship, as they are about to begin their journey to the mainland. The title card reminds the viewer, 'Last look at St Kilda. The Lonely Western Isle.' Immediately following this, the last remaining four men and a dog arrive onboard the ship and are lined up in front of the camera for posterity. Rather than show the viewer one last distant view of St Kilda the film ends abruptly, without sentiment. This is not a happy ending by any means.

A later example of a posterity production made in Scotland that is also centred on an evacuation is *Bothwellhaugh-Village Life* (1962-65, 54.34 mins, colour/silent). This film echoes scenes of community life found in *Evacuation of St Kilda*, as the filmmaker documents residents of the town over a five year period before the buildings are knocked down or otherwise abandoned, all to make way for the A74 Hamilton bypass. Likewise the film functions as an aid to memory for the residents and their children to capture a part of their life that would be otherwise difficult to describe. The discovery of outtakes from the main film, especially *Bothwellhaugh- Orange Walks* (1962-65, 21.41 mins, colour/silent) give a different impression of the 'community' from the main film.[33] The filmmaker's decision not to film in the Catholic area of the village gives a selective image of the town.

From these examples it is clear that posterity productions form a certain impression of life, one distinct from other non-fiction amateur films that we have encountered so far. While films such as *Evacuation of St Kilda* and *Bothwellhaugh-Village Life* deserve fuller analysis because of their very uniqueness, in this chapter an exploration of some other posterity

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[33] Also see *Bothwellhaugh* (1962, 7.28 mins, colour/silent) and the BBC Scotland documentary *The Drowned Village* (1999, 30 mins)

productions, practiced by other amateur filmmakers all around Scotland, will form the content of my analysis.

## The Transience of Trades

As the *Evacuation of St Kilda* and *Bothwellhaugh-Village Life* implicitly acknowledge, while nature endures, the same does not apply for man-made materials. They have a tendency to decay and wither away, while it takes many thousands of years for landscape to transform so dramatically. The medium of film has been best placed to capture these short-term changes in our ways of life, so that we can that we can reflect on just how much has really changed over the last one hundred years. For example, an amateur film such as *Denny Closure* (1963, 10 mins, colour/silent) documents the last days of the Glasgow shipyard. This is a subject that had already been made mythic by the Films of Scotland sponsored film *Seawards the Great Ships* (1960) just a few years before. While that film insists the industry is strong and will continue well into the future, *Denny Closure* tells a different story.

Outside of concerns of heavy industry in the central belt, we can find numerous examples of smaller trades and business practices which have been less well documented by professional filmmakers. Kay Gordon's amateur film, *Linen Weaving* (c1963, 4 mins, b&w/silent), is a record of a small business specialising in this craft which was based in the north east of Scotland. A trade that might have once been popular and widely adopted across the land was now the preserve of a specialised business or the amateur craftsmen. Sensitive to such developments and its wider historical importance, the amateur filmmaker was best placed to film these small operations before they disappeared completely. This was also the case further north, as a local heritage society made a very technically competent film entitled *The Art of Coopering* (1973, 22 mins, colour/sound). This film argues, by the very adoption of its

provocative title, that the trade of coppering is comparable to the cultural status of artistic objects. The barrels that this small trade makes, to sell to fishermen so that fish can be packed away and transported around the world, are again, by the 1970s, approaching the end of their utilitarian function. Fishing in that area, once a centre of the European industry, had long since been in decline. The barrels were no longer needed in such quantity and could no longer sustain overheads of production and labour costs. However, the local heritage society, The Wick Society (the focus of the other case study in this chapter), was keenly aware that this was the last cooperage in operation in Scotland and saw an opportunity to make a testament to the craftsmen's skills that would soon become redundant. The resulting film, at least without its soundtrack, very much resembles the visuals of a professionally made sponsored film. Like *Linen Weaving* it follows the narrative of the production process itself, as we witness a barrel being constructed by hand out of wood. Once this process is complete, the barrel is very skilfully moved into a storage facility housing perhaps over one hundred identical products. This craft has become an art after the introduction of the amateur filmmakers camera.

The difference between a sponsored film and an amateur film on crafts and trades may seem negligible when viewing silent amateur films. However, when a soundtrack is added the uniqueness of the posterity production becomes much more clear and distinct. This is most obvious when another film focused on a trade associated with the fishing industry is consulted. *The Last Fisherman* (1961, 15.27 mins, colour/sound) documents the practice of digging for lugworms to be later used as bait by fishermen off the northeast coast of Scotland. Made by Clansman Films, this group was the documentary offshoot of the earlier examined Group Five films. A later production, *Clansman At Work* (1965, 3.5 mins, b&w, sound), provides a humorous insight into the working methods of an amateur film collective. With *The Last Fisherman*, Clansmen attempted to make a tribute to a solitary surviving workman from another age. The voiceover is key to setting up the situation:

> In this *modern age*, only one or two men are prepared to spend the time and effort, to dig for lug for the fishermen and this may have contributed to the *decline* of the popularity of the line fishing (note: my emphasises).

This sentence seeks to position this man as a relic from a pre-modern age, however not in the form of criticism, but rather as an exemplary example of the dedication and thankless toil of an earlier generation whose labour practices are on the verge of disappearing. This specific example of declining crafts was to be found on the tidal estuary of the River Iston, 'just two or three miles from the old fishing village of Golloson, Aberdeenshire'. Over the light-hearted pastiche score of 'The Drunken Sailor' we are introduced to the individual, known only as Norman, who will form the focus of this film: the last fisherman in the village from a once highly lucrative business.

The isolated situation of 'the last fisherman', or rather the last line fisherman, is established through a sequence at the beginning of the film when shots of a family of fishermen who are moving a boat to the sea, are followed by Norman, sitting alone, quietly baiting his line and checking his hooks, before finally the lugworm are attached as bait. When we are informed that this process takes up most of the day it starts to become clear how inefficient and unviable this trade has become in the face of mass production methods.

The individual nature of Norman's trade continues along the production process, as in the evening he prepares to shoot his line. He pushes the wheelbarrow by himself down to the village harbour and climbs down to his small boat. This activity is carefully framed and held for duration in long shot, filmed from a high vantage point, seeking to emphasise Norman as an isolated figure in front the vast expanse of sea and the formidable forces of nature.

Given the themes of the film it is somewhat surprising that the score remains cheerfully upbeat, suggesting that, despite the hardships, Norman retains a positive outlook towards his

profession. This is a hymn to the positive benefits of hard work, only this time taking a more grounded and personal view of its subject than is often the case in the Films of Scotland series. Here the subject of the film has a name and suffers on going about his duties.

When Norman leaves land and pushes out to sea, Clansman frame him using closer views. This could be explained as being because of practical restrictions. The boat is quite small so longer views in keeping with scenes on land were not possible. Whatever the reasons, the effect is that at least when working at sea, Norman's face and his personal struggles are brought into focus for the viewer. While the explanatory quality of the commentary, when he is releasing his lines into the sea, is synonymous with a sponsored film, it takes a different turn later in the film, when Norman returns to find his catch after a few hours sleep, 'Constant exposure to the cold and to seawater, can play havoc with Norman's hands, so he wears heavy rubber gloves as protection when hauling the line.' It would be hard to find such a line in a sponsored film, acknowledging as it does the painful physical realities of manual labour at sea in such harsh weather conditions. This admission of the fragilities of the human body in doing this kind of work would be overlooked in films paid for by company directors. A confession such as this, on the part of both the worker and the filmmakers, is not centred on exploitation but about recording what people were willing to put their bodies through to make a good living for themselves and their families. After all, Norman was not at the beck and call of an employer, but had a degree of independence, precisely because he was self-employed.

It is not just the physical labour and the weather that Norman had to contend with on a day-to-day basis, but also the very long hours. We are informed that he has to make such an early start so the catch can be gutted before the morning market. The fact that he has to once again do all this by himself throws the elaborate mass production processes evident in *Around Wick Harbour* (1936) (which will be examined in the next case study) into stark relief. After hauling in his catch, the camera is aimed at him as his boat enters the harbour, in contrast to the

shot directed *away* from him in favour of the approaching harbour, earlier on in the film. This shift of focus redirects attention away from the landscape towards the human: in the process recording Norman's sense of personal pride and achievement nearing the end of a few days hard work. His labour has conquered the natural elements, but he still has some work to do to make his catch into a saleable commodity.

As he proceeds to gut and pack his recent catch into barrels, for sale at the market, the seagulls flying overhead, watching him go about his work. The noises from these birds come to dominate the soundtrack and the camera tilts towards the sky to catch a glimpse of them circling over Norman, while he transports the fish to the early morning market in Peterhead using a wheelbarrow. The film then cuts back to a shot of Norman sitting alone once again, quietly and patiently baiting his line in preparation for his next trip out onto the sea. The screen then slowly fades to black as this cycle has returned to its beginning. However, the film has not reached its end and still has some conclusions to be reached.

From the blackness of the screen, shots of seagulls appear once again. Their distinctive sounds have been added on by Clansman to further emphasise their presence. Over these sounds the voiceover returns, noting, 'The scavenging seagulls descend like a cloud on the pier and in a few moments no sign of the mornings work remains.' This observation, along with accompanying shots of the pack of seagulls as they all fly away, presumably onto the next opportunity for some easy food, is immediately followed by a very long shot which holds on a view of a small lorry arriving on the pier, loading up the fish Norman has caught all by himself. The question suggests itself: is there a deliberate comparison between the 'scavenging' seagulls and the lorry within this sequence? Do both groups descend on this lone man's work with equal ruthlessness? This melancholic note is taken further as the narrator concludes, 'It seems strange that line fishing is declining; for people say that line caught fish taste sweeter than any other.' *The Last Fisherman* then finishes as the lorry, now stocked up on

fish, slowly drives out screen left and the film fades to black for the last time. The final title card, 'The End', is written in sand, before waves and seaweed slowly wash the letters away. The sounds of seagulls continue to dominate the soundtrack, implying that they have been left to fight over the leftovers that cannot be sold. As the waves leave only empty sand, the transience of mans' efforts in the face of nature is all that remains.

The quotation from the narrator above is significant. It demonstrates a simultaneous lament for the disappearing past, but it also contains a suppressed hope that this practice might one day reappear in the future. The film is therefore a document of record, but also a means of passing on information to future generations that might otherwise get lost along the way. If this fish is really sweeter than any other, then its decline is not inevitable, but it is a method of fishing that is moving away from the mass market into becoming a speciality for the few who could afford to pay for the labour that results in this sweeter fish. The implication is that 'scavenging' consumers do not realise what they have lost. Now, as we shall see, it was not just disappearing trades that amateurs felt the need to capture on film. The final journeys of modes of mass transport also held fascination for Scotland's amateur filmmakers.

*Final Journeys*

If the pioneers of motion picture technology innovated an early version of filmic futurism in the form of the 'phantom ride', then amateur filmmakers half a century later gave this type of journey a twist. While phantom rides celebrated the excitement of journeys on the new products of modernity, including cars, trains and trams, the later posterity productions were made to commiserate their closure. Once again, the camera documented the journey; only instead of the first experience they now recorded the last. The camera captures the exact route

of the journey so that later generations can view something that they can no longer directly experience.

Two films made in the same year document the closure of railway lines in separate parts of the country. *The Port Line* (1965, 9.22 mins) and *Ardrossan Montgomerie Pier Railway Line Closure* (1965c, 17 mins) record the routes taken by trains on lines and through stations that will soon be abandoned. The closure of the Ardrossan Montgomerie Pier Railway was a result of the British Railway Board Transport Act of 1962. As we travel along the line for the last time, the filmmaker seems to be aspiring towards a complete mapping of the track. Moving along endless line and through deserted stations, at one point the train passes by two men waiting at the side of the track, who presumably are there especially to see this train. One man touches his cap to greet both the crew and the vehicle. Stylistically this is another example of an amateur film full of shaky camera work and digression of subject matter. In fact half way through, the journey of the train is completely abandoned as the filmmaker captures some children playing close to the track. This sequence is typical home movie material and has little connection to the rest of the film. Following this, the film develops into shots of stationary trains before they leave on their travels, in what could only be of interest to train spotters. However there does seem to be some effort to capture the newer 47707 British Rail locomotive as it passes the older models, a visual metaphor once again hinting at the future while mourning that which has become obsolete. A few minutes later the reels simply run out; unlike *The Last Fisherman* there is no title card announcing the end of the film.

In silent films of this type, it is often difficult to understand what is happening if you have no previous knowledge of the subject and no individual figure to be introduced to and follow throughout the rest of the film. Without an explanatory commentary this film exists as *pure document*, waiting to be put into context by a mediator. This is a problem that a film such as *The Tarbert Mail Run* (1969, 14 mins, colour/sound) does not have to the same extent. What

is interesting about this title is that it was filmed while the mail run was still in operation. Yet the voiceover has a *retrospective* quality, as if it is now all just a memory. Over shots of the boat about to leave port, along with accompanying classical music, the voiceover explains the journey that we are about to follow:

> At half past nine every morning, expect Sunday, the Loch Fyne *used* to set off from Gourock on her journey to Tarbert Loch Fyne with mail and cargo for Kintire, Islay and Jura, as well as the ports of call en route to Tarbert (my emphasis).

This clearly outlines the route and sets up viewer expectations that will then be satisfied by the rest of the film. Just as at moments *The Last Fisherman* resembled the sponsored film, so parts of *The Tarbert Mail Run* are very similar to a tourist film. As places are passed, the commentary evokes the kinds of descriptions most commonly heard on guided tours for tourists. This journey is mostly landscape filmed from a distance on the boat, with very few people brought into focus. This tendency is offset when the narrator introduces the skipper, Captain MacAllan, 'known to everyone as Dougie'. To personalise a key individual in a film such as this helps to guide audience identification, through what could have been an alienating account of landscapes. This is also the case when another crewmember, Hamish, is filmed and named for the record. Sharing the subjective experience of these men is a key strategy employed by the filmmakers to structure the film and bring it towards a satisfying conclusion. On the very last journey of the Tarbert mail run, which took place on the 30th of September 1969, while people on the visual track wave goodbye, the narrator notes, 'When the Loch Fyne left harbour for the last time, she was dressed from stern to stern, but Dougie carried out his usual routine of going to his cabin to do some writing, so he claimed.' This is followed by a shot of Dougie walking past the camera, which then tilts up to a flag blowing in the wind. Since the journey has already been mapped for the viewer on a previous trip, the very last one

is condensed to the poignant emotions of leaving and arriving. As the boat enters her final destination, the filmmakers managed to film footage of The Loch Fyne from another moving boat close by. A large crowd of people were there to greet it on its final dock. This seemingly joyous community event is undercut by the final comment:

> After making her last call at Gourock, The Loch Fyne sailed out of service to berth at the East India wharf in Greenock and to be put up for sale. Dougie went home to Glasgow and without a word to anyone, he retired.

This highly important and emotive information could only be conveyed through a voiceover. The fact that Dougie retired at the same time re-enforces the strong connection that was implied between the skipper and ship throughout the film. Without this knowledge the film would merely end on visuals of the ship being welcomed by a large crowd, a scene that would have none of the melancholic ambivalence which results when visuals, music and voice are combined. *The Tarbert Mail Run* is therefore a fuller and richer viewing experience because of these elements working together. This was also the case for the series of films that were made around the country to mark the passing of the tram systems in Scotland's cities.

A number of filmmakers worked on similar films at around the same time. These include two films on the last tram in Edinburgh, *Into the Mist* (1956, 10 mins) and *Edinburgh Says Farewell to its Trams* (1956, 3 mins), as well as *Last Tramcar City of Aberdeen* (3rd May 1958, 10 mins), *Glasgow in the Sixties 1960s* (10 mins), *Glasgow Tramways and Clarkston Trolley Buses* (1953-1967, 10 mins) and *Scotland's Last Tram* (1962, 2 mins). However, the film that really stands out is *Nine Dalmuir West* (1962, 12.36 mins, b&w/sound).

Made by the amateur filmmaker and writer Kevin Brownlow, who went on to get a distribution deal for his feature film *It Happened Here* (1963) just one year later, this is a highly impressive short film about the last weekend of the trams in Glasgow. Modelling itself, as it announces in one of the opening title cards, on John Krish's film about the last London

tram *The Elephant Will Never Forget*, this is one of the most stylistically sophisticated amateur films in the archive. Once again the voiceover is important, as it sets the scene by opening in highly dramatic tones, 'Glasgow, September 1962, there is an impending sense of loss, of desolation in the air, the tramcar is dead.'[34] From there, with that apocalyptic tone, the film proceeds to outline a thesis on why this is happening. Over photography and quick cutting that could easily pass for a professional newsreel, the film outlines its argument:

> Rush hour and a number nine demonstrates why the tram could not survive. The cars interrupt traffic flow and passengers frequently risk their lives on slippery sets of cobbles. But the city is losing more than a matter of transport; it's losing a way of life. For the people of Glasgow the tram is a symbol of the hard years. It was one of the few amenities that they could afford, and one of the few pleasant memories they retain. Now prosperity chokes the streets with private cars, chain stores and supermarkets replace local industry and the little shops. Glasgow enters the 1960s at the expense of its character.

It is noticeable that like *The Last Fishermen*, this film, at least in its voiceover, attempts to point towards possible explanations as to why this service is no longer commercially viable in the way that it had been just a few years before. Similarly it then goes on to outline what will be lost when this service desists. Brownlow's film makes a particular point about how women tram drivers were common on the Glasgow routes and an accepted part of the community. This had been the case since the First World War and he hits the message home by introducing a 73 year old woman, a retired bus driver, who started driving trams in 1916 and still enjoys catching up with the workers. The problem was that the Corporation in Glasgow did not employ women bus drivers, so these women could not transfer their skills to the bus services. They had to look for other forms of employment, 'Tonight will bring the end of their world'. So that future generations can see that this was the case, we follow a woman bus diver on the job.

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[34] Written by George Behrend and spoken by Paul Dickson

Like *The Tarbert Mail Run*, a journey along the route maps out a sense of space, but this time instead of classical music and long languorous shots, we get quick cutting, oblique angles and up-tempo music. Views of the trams travelling along Argyle Street are interspersed with quick shots of other remnants of an anachronistic Glasgow, including signs of the The Mercat Croft of Glasgow, 'Built in the year of Grace 1929' and also the Plaza Ballroom. This sequence builds a mood of celebration, energy and excitement. However, once again like *The Tarbert Mail Run*, when a male driver takes over the shift and proceeds to take the trams back on its last journey, the music turns sober and the tone of the film turns sour. Young men with cameras line the streets, taking still photos and making their own posterity productions with amateur film cameras, become incorporated into the film in a reflexive way. At first they seem to be noted by the narrator with approval, 'Cameras line the routes, recording the moments when the mundane become the historic', but just one minute later the voiceover condemns their motives, 'the tram enthusiast was not known in the trams' hey day, he only attends its funeral.' From this, it is clear that Brownlow sees himself as separate from these other photographers and filmmakers: instead of recognising that he shares their instincts towards posterity.

The final sequence in *Nine Dalmuir West* is an exemplary piece of creative documentary filmmaking. Two scenes, apparently happening simultaneously, are crosscut to provide a vivid contrast between the last tram service and the farewell party for the workers. This effect is heightened by the contrast between the loud accordion music at the party as the workers are having a great time and the silence as the tram makes its way through the crowds gathered on the Glasgow streets. This ironic contrast, along with almost grotesque visuals of the drunk workers dancing, effectively critiques them for not having a strong emotional attachment to their means of employment. It is certainly a far cry from Dougie's sadness on his final journey on The Loch Fyne. The voiceover leaves no ambiguity about this criticism, 'Tonight the trams crews enjoy themselves. Not until tomorrow will they realise what they've

lost'. To patronise the tram workers in this way, while unfair, is evidence of a freedom of editorial content that a sponsored film would not enjoy. To take the bitterness of the event out on the workers is a lapse of judgement that mars an otherwise impressive piece of social history and a strong example of the potentials of amateur filmmaking.

## *Conclusion*

This chapter has attempted to outline several popular forms of posterity production as they were made all over Scotland. It is clear that the posterity production was not unique to Scotland, as the demonstrated by the example of Major A.W Gill, a British officer in the Indian army. His films of the tin mines and the China clay, including *Cornwall Crafts and Industries*, made during the 1930s, show a similar foresight in recording local industries that were in decline. As Elayne Hoskin, from the South West Film and Television Archive, explains, 'Here was a man who was fascinated by what he saw was (sic) a way of life that was changing and disappearing before his very eyes. So he actively went out and sought to record this dying way of life.'[35] He exhibited a similar social commitment and response to the changes brought about by modernity, as various filmmakers in Scotland. This example points the way towards further research into posterity productions as an international phenomenon. It produced films that may initially look similar to sponsored documentaries or tourist films, but with their own very distinct qualities.

This early survey of posterity productions in Scotland suggests that amateur filmmakers did not just restrict themselves to filming the declining trades and crafts. They also filmed islands and towns that were to be evacuated, as well as having special affection for the last journeys of modes of transport that had become unsustainable in the face of changing lifestyles

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[35] *Nation On Film*, 'Private Passions', BBC2, March 2005

and technology. The retrospective voiceover is also vital in making these films accessible to audiences and hence securing the nostalgic mode of spectatorship.

## (5:3) Remakes: The Wick Society

*Introduction*

The far north of Scotland, in particular the town of Wick, can lay claim to being the subject of some of the oldest films in the Scottish Screen archive. These films known as Kinora reels, little more than thirty seconds in length, document a fleet of fishing vessels entering Wick harbour before the turn of the twentieth century. These images, filmed using moving image technology prior to the standardisation of 35mm, provide a unique glimpse of a local industry just before the widespread adoption of mass industrial fishing. Their very survival, over a hundred years later, is a testament the care with which they were preserved. However, images of this remote area are surprisingly plentiful thanks to various amateur and voluntary local organisations over the years.

The Scottish Screen archive recently completed negotiations for the depositing of over six hours of non-fiction material documenting the history of the town of Wick and its surrounding areas up until the late 1970s. The close study of this material reveals a unique local narrative that this footage allows us access to. While there is an abundance of material it is clear that certain topics recur again and again over the years: in particular the local fishing industry, fundraising and hobbies. In the same way as the films studied in the last section (Amateur Cinema and Visions of Community) demonstrated, a symbolic image of the unity of the community is created by the selections and omissions of many different local filmmakers over the years. However, the intervention of a heritage group in the 1970s changes this story

and moulds it in a unique way. This chapter attempts to explain this, and also to reflect on what this suggests for the study of amateur cinema.

## The Caithness Film Club

The Caithness Film Club picked up where the filmmakers using the Kinora cameras left off. During the 1930s and 40s this local cine-club turned their cameras on similar subjects as the early pioneers. Newly standardised 16mm equipment allowed this group to document civic life in the town of Wick in a way not possible before. This cine-club organised activity in a way that transformed its approach to the material that they chose as subjects. Lone workers tend to either dedicate themselves to artistic production or their efforts are subsumed into generalised family activity. Cine-clubs on the other hand, due to the inherent socialisation with people who are not members of their immediate family, tend to be pushed towards making films about community life. This was true for The Caithness Film Club, as can be seen from the films that survive.

Most of the films can be separated into two broad categories: images of industry and images of leisure. These two opposite, yet related, sides to life in the town represent the main topics of interest for the civic filmmaking group. Like their earlier counterparts, filmmakers in the town obsessively returned to the harbour as source of dynamic material for moving images. This would have seemed like an obvious choice, as the harbour was the heart of employment and activity for the town during the 1930s and 1940s. Wick was at the centre of the herring-fishing boom in Scotland at the turn of the century. In fact, the town was actually created out of two small hamlets (Wick and Pultneytown) that were developed by the architect Thomas Telford. Government officials realised that it was in a prime location for the predicted boom in fishing, and heavy investment went into the building of new housing in Pultneytown, just south

of Wick River. This was the only development completely designed by Thomas Telford. Many people moved to the area from surrounding villages and towns and even further afield, all looking to prosper as a part of this new industry. Around this time for instance, Robert Louis Stevenson's father lived in the town to oversee the development of a new pier (a project that was abandoned midway through construction, the remains of which can still be seen, partly due to the uncooperative weather and harsh seas). Wick was then the centre of fishing on the east coast and the harbour was the centre of most livelihoods, a period later fictionalised in Neil Gunn's famous novel *The Silver Darlings* (1941). It was common to hear Norwegian and Russian on the street of Wick at this time, the fishing being the locus of a massive international exporting trade around Europe. Reflecting this, the Caithness Film Club made numerous films of harbour life, including *Wick Harbour and Foals* (1937). The most interesting of these films for our purposes is *Around Wick Harbour* (1936, 12 mins, colour/silent), a film that stands out from the rest for a number of reasons. Superficially, in synopsis, it may resemble elements of *Drifters* (John Grierson, U.K, 1928): it enacts a basic narrative of industrial capitalism common to documentary films of this era as it documents the transportation, gutting, packing and auctioning of herring at the height of its international trade. The entire film takes place on land, expanding a small section of *Drifters* (part four) out to encompass an entire short film. The title card from that part of *Drifters* could almost be describing Wick as it was at the end of the nineteenth century, 'And the sound of the sea and the people of the sea are lost in the chatter and chaffer of a market for the world.' It was a place that attracted workers from all over Europe to earn a living. At this time it was normal to hear up to ten different languages being spoken around that area of Pultneytown. In many ways it represents a *celebration* of these processes and the workers who toil away in their particular division of labour. However, there were many films made of local fishing industries in Scotland. In fact, one adjudicator at

the 1940 S.A.F.F complained that there were too many. The question remains: why is this one so important?

Firstly, *Around Wick Harbour* was highly commended at the 1940 S.A.F.F, despite the fact that there were so many other films on fishing that were entered that year. Therefore, it was recognised as being of superior quality even at the time of production, when the people making those judgements saw far more amateur films than is possible today. Secondly, unlike the other films, it was filmed in colour at a time when that was still unusual. As a historical document this is invaluable. Thirdly, *Around Wick Harbour* is evidently a product of Stebbins' 'serious leisure', compared with the 'casual leisure' of the other films on Wick harbour and the fishing industry. While it is true that members of the Caithness Film Club made this film, the major difference is in the authorial signature. *Around Wick Harbour* was made by a young professional photographer, Alex Johnston, who is responsible for many of the defining photographic images of the local herring industry in Wick. As an art school graduate and second-generation photographer, the remarkable sophistication in the photography and editing is explicable. The amateur's potential to match or surpass professional standards is fully evident in this particular work and it would not be obvious that it was an amateur film unless the titles gave the game away. The panning is slow and steady and the film conforms to most classical ideals. The editing, which has a rhythmic quality, is not just suggestive of mechanical processes but also the natural pulse of the sea and the waves. A few sequences however stand out: the beginning of the film, as a fishing vessel is followed as it enters the harbour is suggestive. The film opens with the camera moving from an extreme long shot on a cliff top, to a medium shot on the pier, to a close up as the boat passes the panning camera. On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that footage of at least two boats has been combined in order to suggest the movement of one boat journey into dock. This substitution of various boats to suggest the *idea* of a single boat entering the harbour is what Noel Carroll refers to as

nominal portrayal. This is very rare in these films: they tend to use physical portrayal (recording units instead of expositional units) as the dominant aesthetic strategy (Carroll 1983: 28). Pragmatically it is understandable why this combination was necessarily, but its successful implementation is revealing of a creative approach to direction untypical of amateur cinema as a whole. The middle of the film also reveals some interesting creative choices. When filming the auctioneer Dan Stewart, and his attempts to sell a fresh box of herring to an assembled crowd, Stewart looks directly into the camera. As the prices increase, it is obvious that he is enjoying his performance as the film cuts to a large close up. A complete negation of the observational style of filming, this footage makes it clear that amateurs moved in and out of such restrictive paradigms with ease. Moments that would have been cut out of a professional production of the time, such as when a woman gutting fish looks up to smile at Alex Johnston's camera, give the film an intimacy and charm lacking in more distant anthropological attempts at capturing the working-class on film typical of professional filmmakers. Overall though, *Around Wick Harbour* successfully guides us through a visual journey using techniques that most professionals would recognise as reaching professional standards. This film captures a unique harbour at a key moment of its history and preserves it for succeeding generations.

The Caithness Film Club also did the same for images of various leisure pursuits in the area. In this regard, filming of the Wick Model Yacht Club is hard to imagine being made in the professional sector. Whereas, Films of Scotland could conceivably make *Around Wick Harbour*, a filmic record of local leisure activity in the far north of Scotland would have been unlikely to have been made using sponsorship or public money. Amateur records of people having fun building and sailing their own homemade yachts on Loch Watten are very far from discourses of 'Scotland on the move'. The intimacy of filmmaker and subject in these films is suggestive of the rather élite status of the participants of both the film and model yacht club.

The expense of both of these activities would preclude mass participation. The casualness of the photography and editing makes it clear that little time has been spent pre-planning this film, a feature Richard Chalfen also notes in relation to home movies. However, the subject matter is not typical of a home movie because it documents group activity outside the private sphere. A community of non-family members almost never make it into home movies; therefore *Wick Model Yacht Club* operates within a different register.

Similarly, many films were made during the 1930s on the Wick Gala parades. This charity event, which takes place every July in the town, was originally an opportunity for the fishing industry to help raise money for local causes and charities. This event took place for the first time in July 1937, an occasion that nearly ten thousand people lined the street of Wick to witness.[36] The visual centrepiece of the Gala Week was typically the opening Saturday night. Here, the ceremony of what was known as the Herring Queen took place beside the harbour in front of on-looking crowds. The Herring Queen was a young teenage girl from a fishing family who would represent the charitable spirit of the coming week. The ceremony, which would involve the previous year's queen handing over the crown to the new figurehead, seems an inheritance from earlier pagan rituals of the area. Then the Herring Queen and her (helpers) would then lead the procession of carts round the streets of the town. Each 'float' had people dressed up in fancy dress encouraging the assembled crowds to give money as they passed. Looking back on this footage from today's vantage point, these films are technically very competent. Mostly photographed from a static camera on a tripod, the images of the passing carts are vivid and rich. It is also clear that some effort has gone into editing this footage together for public shows; the time lag between each cart passing the static camera is eliminated by the use of jump cuts. The use of this technique was common amongst amateurs of the time who were not trying to emulate the 'smoothness' of typical professional

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[36] Information from interview with Mr Sutherland, on the television programme *The Way It Was* Grampian TV, Episode Number 77, 1996.

productions. Finally, the most noticeable feature of the footage depicting carts passing through the Bridge Street is the abundance of Union Jack flags in the assembled crowds. These films therefore tell a story of loyalty to the British crown on a scale specific to the time.

These films are a product of an organised leisure activity during the 1930s that resulted in a number of interesting films that allow us to visually witness a past mostly confined to still photographs and written accounts. The group activity of these civic filmmakers shows us how film could be used within a community. They would prove to be a gift to future generations, whether they were intended that way or not.

## The Formation of The Wick Society

The Wick Society was set up in 1971, its initial objective being to save the Thomas Telford designed buildings on the lower Pultneytown side of the town from demolition by the council. Iain Sutherland described town officials as 'hooligans masquerading as architects', a statement that clearly sets up the opposition between heritage and modernisation on the ground level. In this regard what was happening in Wick is consistent with a wider revival of interest in issues of heritage from the 1970s onwards (Samuel 1994), as many post-industrial towns sought to position themselves as being in possession of a unique account of the national past in order to aid tourism to the area (McCrone et al 1995). In the face of economic downturns in mass industry, many such schemes helped make the best of difficult situations. However it must be remembered that during the 1970s, volunteers not business people formed most of these organisations, coming out of a genuine personal connection to their local heritage. There was very little thought given to potential economic benefits in the beginning and participants were giving up their own leisure time to contribute to the good cause. Unlike other parts of the country where the dominant form of heritage being preserved with government grants were

aristocratic country houses, in a place such as Wick the primary concern was with a more egalitarian form of preservation. These were workers houses not country mansions; it was a heritage from the ground up.

The Wick Society was unsuccessful in saving the Telford buildings, yet continued into other areas of local interest, such as the Wick Heritage Centre. A non-profit organisation run by a group of volunteers, the centre acquired many items of historic value such as clothing and furniture and made exhibits out of period recreations. Links were gradually established between The Wick Society and the local council. The financial support that resulted from this mutually beneficial relationship was crucial in expanding operations. The council could then be seen as encouraging an organisation whose efforts would be of great interest to returning emigrant families and interested tourists from all over the world.

One of the Wick Society's most significant interventions was the rescuing and preservation of the vast collection of photographs from the Johnson archive: a family photography business that as well as specialising in portraiture, also took many still photographs of the local fishing industry.[37] Many thousands of these images were taken over a period of over forty years from the beginnings of the local industry to its decline in the post-war years. In this respect, they form a much more complete and comprehensive record of activity in the town than moving image photography has achieved. A display of a selection of these photographs were subsequently incorporated into an exhibition in the Wick Heritage Centre along with a reconstruction of the Johnston family shop that was located in the High Street. In short, The Wick Society's mission became one of recording and preserving a vanishing local culture.

For our purposes, one of the most crucial developments in this process was the acquisition of the negatives of the Caithness Film Club. The former secretary passed on

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[37] A television documentary detailing the Johnston photographs aired on BBC1 Scotland in 2002.

*Around Wick Harbour* and other films, along with the original 16mm camera that was used

during their production. The Caithness Film Club had dissolved during the Second World War

because of film rationing and more pressing concerns. It had never reformed, yet the films

were stored away and remained in remarkably good condition. When they were later in the

possession of The Wick Society, the films were locked in a bank vault, as a centralised national

archive was only just in the process of being formed. However, these films were occasionally

screened as part of a program of material of interest to local and sometimes national audiences.

It was within this context that two founding members of the Wick Society, Iain Sutherland and

Ian Mackenzie, started producing their own non-fiction films of the area.


## *Historical Echoes*


'So the old yards fell silent for the last time. In common with its
smaller neighbours, who had earlier felt the cold hand of failure,
Wick's herring trade passed over the horizon between reality and
memory.'

(Sutherland 1983: 80).


As Iain Sutherland's history of the demise of Wick's herring trade ends on that elegiac note,

my study begins. Just how exactly was that 'horizon between reality and memory' negotiated,

and what role did he, and the organisation he set up, have to play in this process of

remembering?

The original motivation behind re-making films of contemporary life in Wick was for

the benefit of future fishing historians. The move from preservation to production was a step

towards a more active form of activity than was perhaps typical of similar heritage

organisations around the country. Most heritage organisation activity is centred on preserving

the artefacts that already exist, not producing new material for the future. This makes The Wick Society films especially curious in many respects.

The very idea of remaking past productions using the same equipment seems especially odd. The remake may be firmly established as a practice in the professional cinema industry, yet it is extremely rare in an amateur sector consisting of a non-standardised product. The motivations behind these particular remakes were altogether different from those of a professional film producer. These remakes were not intended to capitalise on an already existing property but rather to exist alongside it. These films were companion pieces to the originals in a spirit of generosity. Produced outside of the contexts of cine-club culture and never intended for entry into the S.A.F.F it is not surprising that the films are extremely different from their predecessors.

If a film such as *Around Wick Harbour* could be said to be the product of 'serious leisure' activity, its remake, *Around Wick Harbour 1974/75* is more typical of trends towards causal leisure. The images that The Wick Society, Mr Iain Sutherland and Mr Ian Mackenzie, photographed of both industry and leisure are marked by a less rigorous approach towards photography and editing. However, rather than dismiss these films as somehow inferior copies of the originals from the 1930s, we should instead try to understand their production within a very different amateur culture of the 1970s.

First of all it should be noted that these films were made by a couple of individuals rather than an organised group. By the 1970s, organisations such as the Scottish Federation of Film Societies and the symbiotic relationship these societies had in recruitment for cine-club productions, had all but died away. The huge growth in the popular ownership of television sets had a direct impact on the demand for organised screenings of classic films on 16mm. Instead of having to pay to see these films on a big screen, people could now watch many films on television in the comfort of their own home. Enrico Cocozza pointed the finger of blame for

the closure of his Wishaw Film Society at the small screen. Out of this lack of direction to the amateur cine culture, there was an increasing tendency towards lone worker productions; *Bothwellhaugh* and *Fit o' the Toon* (Enrico Cocozza, 1978) are just two examples of such films. These productions were made using minimal resources and personnel, but despite this, many interesting works emerged out of the fractured nature of the cine culture. These films were often of feature length and required considerable perseverance over a long period of time. Despite this commitment, filming would process intermittently, even casually, when the opportunity presented itself. It is within this context that films such as *Around Wick Harbour 1974/75*, the films of the Wick Gala processions and *Wick Model Yacht Club* should be viewed.

These films are fascinating if contrasted with their predecessors. In many respects they are similar. In fact, certain shots are even repeated, such as the opening sequence of *Around Wick Harbour* when the fishing vessel enters the harbour. Like the 1936 film, it starts with a long shot from an overlooking cliff, before cutting to a closer medium shot filmed from the harbour pier. As we again follow this boat into the inner harbour to be unloaded of its catch, the changes that have taken place over the last forty years become more apparent. There has been a vast reduction in the workforce, as can be seen when the fishermen unload and gut the fish, before packing the produce themselves: rather than following a strict division of labour that we can see in the 1936 version. During the height of the international trade of herring at the beginning of the twentieth century, lines upon lines of women were employed to gut herring, a process done at high speed in the Johnston film. By contrast, the Wick Society film shows that the downgrading of the industry had meant that the workforce had become exclusively male. The strength of this film as a companion piece to the 1936 version of Around Wick Harbour now becomes obvious. The Wick Society consciously re-made the Johnston film so that a compare and contrast model of examination could be attempted.

The film may look formally naïve: when for instance the camera seems to aimlessly follow local men walking around the harbour area and chatting in groups. The remake of *Around Wick Harbour* may be considered overly long, featuring much repetition of subject matter and digressions from an exclusive focus on the fishing industry. However, these seemingly random and unmotivated shots actually serve to highlight the changes that have occurred in this particular geographic area over time; these artistic 'flaws' are its strength as visual evidence. The potential benefits studying this material from a historical and ethnographic perspective are great.

This film attempts to document a town in economic decline during the down turn in North Sea fishing since the 1950s. Instead of a film of fevered industrial activity, the remake presents an image of relative inactivity. Men who would have been working hard as fishermen when the industry was in good health have experienced a vast reduction in potential income as the stocks of the North Sea have so dramatically decreased. This is partly as a result of over fishing by an earlier generation: the generation filmed with such awe and admiration in the first *Around Wick Harbour* and also *Fishing Week 1955* (D. Munro, colour/silent, 8mm, 12 min). The later film used lightweight 8mm technology to record newly modern trawl-fishing techniques on board a particular vessel, something that would have been very difficult with heavier 16mm technology.

The effect this economic down turn was having on the lives of the local fishermen is apparent twenty minutes into *Around Wick Harbour 1974/75*. In a sequence with no equivalent in the Johnston version, the film documents the events of the local fishermen's strike during what became known as the 'Cod Wars' of the 1970s. A handwritten sigh announces 'Fisherman's Meeting: All Requested to Attend', but what actually happened at this meeting is not shown. Instead, what we see is a scene reminiscent of *Employees Leaving the Lumiere Factory* (1885) the inheritance of amateur cinema has to earlier modes of professional

filmmaking demonstrated once again; only this time it is fishermen leaving a meeting. This is filmed by framing the entrance to the hall and letting the camera run for two minutes; a steady procession of fishermen of various ages walk into the frame, some acknowledge the camera, some do not, before they walk out of shot. The length of this shot strives to be comprehensive as a historical record of who exactly attended the meeting. The film is silent, but inter-titles are never used for explanation. An answer to our questions about what we have just seen is provided forty seconds later, when we are shown a number of boats blocking the entrance to the inner harbour. This blockade was motivated by Iceland closing its waters to British boats within a twelve mile radius, and the Wick fishermen complained that foreign fish landings were undercutting local prosperity. Therefore, this protest was retaliation to sanctions that threatened the fishermen's livelihood. Fishermen such as Iain Sutherland's brother James, took part in this three day protest: an event into which the Wick Society's cameras give us a unique insight. This kind of action is in stark contrast to the internationalism that was a feature of the fishing industry in the area during the thirties, but this is a consequence of an industry in decline.

This sequence would have been explained during Iain Sutherland's lectures at the screenings he regularly organises. As a local historian and writer, he is in a perfect position to put the events projected on screen into an appropriate context by providing a running commentary. The Wick Society has held numerous screenings throughout Scotland, 'from Lerwick to Glasgow'[38]. Sutherland would act as a mediator between the past onscreen and the contemporary audience who had come to see the screening in town halls and public spaces across the country. Therefore, the remakes become the visual 'evidence' of Wick's past that is only completed by Sutherland's historical explanations. The Wick Society films are then best

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[38] Personal correspondence with Mr Sutherland, July 2003.

understood as lecture films made as part of the more egalitarian side to the various heritage movements of the 1970s. The films are thus, an aid to personal and community memory.

Like the fishing industry, the gala procession has undergone its own changes over the years. Large haulage lorries now act as transport for the floats, but the same ceremonies and fund raising events still take place, albeit with minor changes. The most historically significant change is the re-naming of the Herring Queen as the Gala Queen, reflecting the demise of the fishing industry. Originally, the Herring Queen was often a fisherman's daughter, now it can be any young woman who attends Wick High School.

The gala procession is still a very popular event in the town, 'the main social event of the year',[39] but it is a tradition that has changed as Wick struggles to redefine itself as a post-industrial market town. In fact, apart from Caithness (which also has the Thurso and Lybster Galas) Iwick is the only other former fishing port to stage a similar event.[40] The fund raising benefits many local charities, but it is very important that the Gala Week takes place in the first week of July, which has become the busiest part of the tourist season. The sight of local people dressing up and performing strange ceremonies has become comparable to a living heritage exhibit, entertaining visitors to the area. As Janet McBain has noted, these films give the sense of 'a participation in community life',[41] which may give the impression that this is a town that proudly holds on to its local heritage. This idea that Wick is more in touch with its past than other metropolitan communities whose 'traditions have fallen by the way side',[42] is something that I would question. These images can be used to construct an imaginary 'wholeness' to community life that has been lost elsewhere, but this would lead to a distorted image of this

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[39] Information from interview with Mr Sutherland, on the television programme *The Way It Was* Grampian TV, Episode Number 77, 1996.
[40] Ibid.
[41] From interview with Janet McBain, on the television programme *The Way It Was* Grampian TV, Episode Number 77, 1996.
[42] Ibid.

town. Therefore, it should be stressed that this is a special event that takes place once a year, and is not an accurate representation of how everyday life is organised the rest of the year.

The most revealing moment occurs twenty-three minutes in, when a title-card announces, 'Sponsored by Wick Town Improvements Committee'. So unlike *Around Wick Harbour 1974/75*, this film had a financial sponsor: the voluntary group who organise the July events. *Wick Harbour and Gala Weeks* could then be used as part of the fund raising that the Wick Town Improvements Committee promoted, so money raised by local screenings of the films would also benefit local charities.

*Wick Model Yacht Club and Gala* (1976/ 1977) was also remake of the earlier Caithness Film Club film. This is still a marginal leisure activity, unlike the annual gala event that involves a large section of the town's population. Despite or perhaps because of the obvious bad weather, an unsteady camera records the men and young boys in medium shot from the banks of Loch Watten. From these images you may get the impression that women have become almost nonexistent in the Wick Model Yacht Club. The female participation, or rather the lack of it, in these activities was also notable between the two versions of *Around Wick Harbour*. Men seem to be the sole focus of the films produced in the 1970s. Stylistically, in the model yacht club films, there is also a movement away from the quick cutting and short running time of the film made in the 1930s, to the long panning shots and longer running time of the remake. This is a tendency that unites films on both industry and leisure and it requires further comment.

At the end of the remake of *Around Wick Harbour*, we as spectators are presented with a 360-degree view of the town from a high vantage point, something without narrative or artistic motivation. This may, on first viewing, seem unusual. However, if we consider the theory of the 'view' aesthetic as has been developed by Tom Gunning, in relation to early non-

fiction filmmaking, we can better understand the motivations of a sequence such as this.[43]

Gunning notes:

> The camera literally acts as a tourist, spectator or investigator, and
> the pleasure in the film lies in the surrogate of looking...In a "view"
> the world is presented to the camera, and therefore to the spectator
> (Gunning 1997: 15).

In this idea of the camera acting as 'tourist, spectator or investigator' there is a resonance to what is happening in the Wick films. Their 'view' aesthetic was part of an almost scientific effort towards a comprehensive 'mapping' of the people and the landscape.[44] Here the camera captures the changing geography of the town, including its suburban developments out towards the coast, as its sweeping pan freezes the image in time. These films then represent a bridge between their present and the retrospective viewer of the future.

## Conclusion

What were intended as companion pieces to the Caithness Film Club films, in fact, through their idiosyncrasies, build on and develop the latent historic and ethnographic impulses of the originals. Together these films give fascinating insights into the culture that they emerged out of. The discourse of the 'local' runs through these films and opens the work up to the viewer in a way that is unusual in a professional film. The titles themselves say as much. The spectator is invited on a visual journey around this particular area in a way that would be inappropriate in a similar film made for a mass audience. The geographical specificity of the work is highly significant.

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[43] Schneider (2003): 171 has previously suggested the application of the view aesthetic to amateur films.
[44] Heather Norris Nicholson has developed this methodology over many articles.

<u>(5:4) Academic Discourse on Heritage</u>

Like other chapters in this thesis, it is clear that amateurs and professionals are referring to very different objects even while using similar terminology. This was most obvious in the first chapter on the discussion of the avant-garde. There is also a fundamental ontological difference between a professional heritage cinema and an amateur heritage cinema. While the professional heritage cinema involves the re-construction of period detail *after the fact*, the amateur heritage cinema involves the filming of events *as they are happening*. The former is primarily the concern of professional cinema, which tends to work within the fictional mode. This type of cinema has been clearly identified and detailed in the writings of Andrew Higson. His work located this tendency within British film production from the 1920s onwards (Higson 1995 & 2003, Hill 1999). Recently, Sarah Neely has extended the heritage debate into Scotland by identifying recent films such as *Mrs Brown* (1997) as using similar iconography as the English heritage films (Neely 2005: 241-45). However, some have argued against the narrow definitions that these debates are located within (Goode 2000).

I want to associate the work in this chapter within these re-definitions of what a 'heritage' cinema can include. In this chapter I am proposing that the exclusion of non-fiction films from the debate is extremely limiting. As the Ernest Oakley articles at the beginning of this chapter demonstrated, the amateur sector was extremely sensitive to ideas of inheritance, both cultural and industrial, as far back as 1932. The inclusion of non-fiction film within the re-definition of heritage cinema broadens the debate, yet at the same time it suggests theoretical problems of its own. Therefore, the conclusion of this chapter is devoted to proposing a methodical framework to consider these amateur heritage films within. How can we account for the ontological difference between a fictional heritage cinema centred on

reconstructions of the past and a non-fiction heritage cinema centred on capturing the present on film before it disappears into the past?

An early theorisation of the tension between cinema as performance and cinema as a form of record is Andre Bazin's famous essay, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image'. In this essay Bazin proposed that cinema inherits a fundamental impulse to capture reality as it appears to the human eye, an impulse that can be traced back to Egypt. He made the audacious connection between the ancient practice of embalming the dead and the eternal human desire to transcend physical death. This, he called the 'mummy complex'. He explained:

> The religion of ancient Egypt, aimed against death, saw survival as depending on the continued existence of the corporeal body. Thus, by providing a defence against the passage of time it satisfied a basic psychological need in man, for death is but the victory of time. To preserve, artificially, his bodily appearance is to snatch it from the flow of time, to stow it away neatly, so to speak, in the hold of life (1967: 9).

Therefore, over time various artistic practices were developed to allow the continued of existence of certain elements of physical reality which can then be handed on to succeeding generations. In ancient Egypt, the only things being deemed important enough to survive were the pyramids and the bodies of its royalty as mummies. However, over time various other mechanisms were developed to achieve similar impulses towards preservation, ones that are no longer primarily focused on the elites, but on a more democratic vision of society. These were processes that lay 'bare the primordial function of statuary, namely, the preservation of life by a representation of life' (10). This would include prehistoric cave paintings, Western portraiture, landscape painting and the more recent invention of photography. The cinema was therefore the latest manifestation of this psychological impulse to cheat death, one that absorbs and extends the desire to faithfully reproduce three-dimensional space in front of the artist, attempted but never fully achieved in the earlier arts. The mechanical nature of photography

and cinema was seen as making images that are much closer to the pro-filmic objects being documented. The artist's decisions about framing, lighting and the direction of their subjects were downplayed in this schema. This elision can be noted in the following passage:

> For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man. The personality of the photographer enters into the proceedings only in his selection of the object to be photographed and by way of the purpose he has in mind (13).

This also effectively subordinates the creative decisions made in post-production in favour of the filming process itself; a system of priorities that Richard Chalfen notes is shared by most home movie makers. However, the tension between representing the symbolic and representing reality is extremely useful in considering amateur cinema, and one that has never been fully resolved.

The links between Andre Bazin's writings on film aesthetics and the amateur film movement are suggestive. Passages of 'The Ontology of the Moving Image' can at times even seem like polemical defences of an amateur film aesthetic:

> No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discoloured, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it is the model (14).

This could easily be a description of the aesthetics, or lack of them, of a typical home movie. These objects are frequently dismissed as lacking the poetic sense that John Grierson said a documentary required. However, Bazin valued this stylistic naivety as being a closer approximation of the pro-filmic model. The links to what Chalfen calls the 'home mode' becomes even more pronounced as Bazin's article goes on:

Hence the charm of family albums. Those grey or sepia shadows, phantomlike and almost undecipherable, are no longer traditional family portraits but rather the disturbing presence of lives halted at a set moment in their duration, freed from their destiny; not, however, by the prestige of art but by the power of an impassive mechanical process: for photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption (14).

This invocation of the psychological need to capture moments of our personal family histories in the form of photographs, in an essay conventionally read as positing an aesthetics for a new mode of professional cinema, may seem somewhat jarring or a diversion from the main thesis. Bazin was fascinated by the *whole* of art, professional and amateur alike, therefore discussion of the recording of private moments was integral to his conception of art; and hence photography.

However, he then took this consideration further: from photographs to the cinema. The traditions of photography had a marked influence over the development of early amateur cinema, as can be seen in articles published in *Home Movies and Home Talkies* and in the static quality of many amateur films from the 1930s. The main difference between the two media being that 'cinema is objectively in time.' (14). The length of the shots themselves and their ability to capture movement being key to the new aesthetics, 'Now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were.' (15). This term 'change mummified' effectively seeks to highlight a contradictory desire to record events that are in the process of flux, in order to preserve them on film unchanged for eternity. This response to the great changes brought about by modernity is consistent with the position taken by Ernest Oakley in the articles written for *Home Movies and Home Talkies* examined at the beginning of this chapter. This phrase 'change mummified' becomes important to later scholars such as Philip Rosen, a source I will come back to later. For now I will note that it is clear that Andre Bazin's aesthetic openness to all forms of cinema, both amateur and

professional, has been lost in studies that have traditionally focused solely on more stylistically regulated professional manifestations.

The indexical nature of the image is what is important here: the 'photograph as such and the object in itself share a common being, after the fashion of a fingerprint.' (15). This sense of resemblance between pro-filmic event and the resulting image is a quality of most concern in the filming of non-fiction subject matter. The desire to capture images of events, which are judged to be important in an imagined future, is an everyday occurrence in everyday family life, as both Andre Bazin and Richard Chalfen note. Even Roland Barthes has commented on the unique contribution of the amateur photographer:

> Usually the amateur is defined as an immature state of the artist: someone who cannot- or will not- achieve the mastery of a profession. But in the field of photographic practice, it is the amateur, on the contrary, who is the assumption of the professional: for it is he who stands closer to the *noeme* of Photography (1984: 98-99).

Using a slightly different terminology, Barthes' hypothesis is surprisingly consistent with the arguments put forward by his predecessor Andre Bazin. The desire to capture images of community events for an imagined future, as was achieved by both Clansman Films and The Wick Society, is still an activity less well documented. These productions are suggestive of a fundamentally different conception of heritage cinema than the one currently in scholarly usage, from both practical and theoretical perspectives.

The decision to make *non-fiction* heritage films, rather than those of a fictional nature, can at least partially be explained by economic considerations. Most amateur filmmakers could not afford to reconstruct locations and costumes, as they would have been in the past. This kind of reconstruction is capital intensive, a production process in conflict with the lack of expenditure involved in most amateur productions. Therefore, amateur filmmakers, instead of

aspiring to match professional standards, approached the slippery nature of the relationship between the past, present and future from a completely different angle. They would film the present for the future, something that most professionals would not have the foresight to do. Professionals were so caught up in the present and trying to make a living that they had no thought for the future. The amateur, because they were not trying to make an immediate living from the material that they shot, could afford to film now and reap the benefits much later.

One contemporary film theorist, who recognises the continuing relevance of Andre Bazin's writings on the ontology of the moving image for continued academic debate into the future, is Philip Rosen. As the title of his recent book suggests, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory*, he sees Bazin's work as proposing a fairly consistent and subtle view of cinematic realism (Rosen 2001). This is especially true of the mummy complex and 'change mummified', 'In oxymoronically yoking together change with stasis, this trope crystallizes the founding paradox of Bazin's cinematic subject, which grounds the coherence of his corpus' (2001: 31). This observation is consistent with my own reading of Bazin's essay above. However, Rosen's work is not satisfied with merely confirming the continued importance of these theories, instead he endeavours to push the debate on cinematic indexicality forward:

> Throughout film history, journalists, critics, and scholars have intermittently written about the deployment of historical narratives in films; however, the related but more fundamental question broached by Kracauer is that of overlaps, intersection, and parallels between the conceptual architecture of modern historicity and the modern, mass-disseminated indexical media of photography and film. The question has rarely if ever been a focus of film theory proper (134-35).[45]

This has clear relevance for the films discussed in this chapter. Amateur films such as *The Last Fisherman*, *Bothwellhaugh* and *Around Wick Harbour 1974/75* are working within this

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[45] Presumably Rosen is here alluding to Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).

framework of cinematic realism that is being indicated and acknowledged but not developed by contemporary debate within Film Studies. In a comment that also has direct pertinence to studies centred on the restricted mode, Richard Chalfen has noted, 'Home mode imagery represents the bastion of the classical film theory which exalts the reproduction of "ontological reality"' (1987: 121). Philip Rosen is not writing directly about amateur filmmaking, but instead more generally about indexical media. This is clear from a later passage of the book in which he writes disparagingly that:

> The problem posed by actualities for documentary as well as fiction filmmaking is that they are too pure as document; machines of indexical representation, even when used by the most amateurish, can indeed produce a seeming infinity of such documents (245).

Putting aside the condescending use of the term 'amateur' for one moment, the above statement is only true if the object of our methods are focused on amateur film per se, not amateur *cinema* as a whole. Study of the material produced by amateurs in a contextual framework, rather than just the film by itself, is the most productive way to read these films that are seemingly 'too pure as document' to be understood textually. As I have demonstrated in my studies of posterity productions and amateur re-makes, it is necessary to place them both within the context of amateur film culture more generally and the local culture they are emerging out of more specifically, to get a fuller picture. Ernest Oakley's early call, in the face of modernity, to film the dying customs and crafts of England therefore comes to full fruition in the move traced in this chapter from amateur discourse, to amateur production to amateur and now professional scholarly consumption. This is the amateur's contribution to a parallel cinema of heritage.

# Chapter 6-

## Amateur Film Re-Located:
## Localism in Fact and Fiction

While the study of amateur film has been frustrated by practical considerations, such as archival access, there are other reasons why this cine movement has often escaped the scholarly agenda. The focus of Film Studies has been on national and latterly trans-national cinemas, so the example of amateur film seemingly falls beyond the attention of these established and evolving paradigms. This 'local' culture seems to be peripheral to the central concerns of on-going debate about cinema. However, these commonly held assumptions on the object of research should be questioned.

In a special issue on 'Local Film' in 2005, the journal *Film History* acknowledged the increasing importance localism is having on contemporary debates. In these articles, local exhibition histories were the primary object of analysis for contributors. However, more relevant issues for this chapter are explored in one essay that is concerned with how spectators experienced the recognition of place in 'local' films (Toulmin and Loiperdinger 2005: 7-18). These are more accurately described elsewhere as 'local topicals'. This is a useful and timely exploration of localism, especially in light of the excitement around the recent discovery of the Mitchell and Kenyon Collection, yet it is surprising that the focus was on local topicals, a genre that has little direct connection to local issues.

The omission of amateur film production from this study is striking given that *Film History* has previously dedicated an issue to what it called 'Small Gauge' film (*Film History*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2003). If anything, it was the amateur filmmaker who was most active in the creation of local film cultures. By contrast, the professional filmmaker's relationship to the local was tentative at best. Professional filmmakers tended to be located in metropolitan

centres, and merely visited more remote locations. Their link to the local was representational rather than cultural. On the other hand, amateur filmmakers were to be found in cities, towns and villages all over the world. Taken together, their collective bodies of work now represent a diversity of filmmaking perspectives. Here my focus will not be on local reception histories, but will instead be on local *production*. This chapter proceeds by asking the following question: what is the 'local' of amateur film production?

To answer this, we might offer a comparison between one sponsored film, *Seawards the Great Ships* (1960) and two amateur films, *Seven Ages* (1957) and *Fit O' The Toon* (1978), i.e. an amateur fiction film, and an amateur documentary. This contrast attempts to demonstrate the ontological differences between non-fiction and fiction amateur films, and to establish that the amateur filmmaker had a *divided* relationship with the local. Via analysis of these amateur productions, I aim to examine how 'local' film production can be theorised within national film culture. However, before proceeding, it has to be noted that observations on the privileged relationship between amateurism and localism are not new. Other writers have dealt with this topic before, and it is to them that we should now turn.

*Localism as Resistance to Nationalism*

Localism is now being absorbed into the lexicon of criticism. However, this is not a new tendency. In fact this is a development that preceded the entry of amateur film into the academy. For example John Hill's contribution to the edited collection *Scotch Reels*, 'Scotland doesna mean much tae Glesca: Some notes on *The Gorbals Story*', as the title suggests, examines the 'local' within professional cinema, at least implicitly (Hill 1982: 100-111). In this case, it explores how working-class Glaswegians do not share the same vision of national life that is associated with the rest of the country, due to the uneven economic development of life

in urban centres. Here localism is out of sync with the implied national imaginary. In keeping

with the priorities of Film Studies in the early 1980s however, the main focus of the essay rests

on assessing the ideological progressiveness of the narrative. Similarly, Patricia R.

Zimmermann's article, 'Morphing History Into Histories: From Amateur Film to the Archive

of the Future', in a development of her earlier empirical studies, sketches how localism might

be a useful framework for the future study of amateur film (2001: 108-130). It begins:

> In this essay, I will propose a tentative, provisional strategy for how
> we can begin to theorize a historiography of amateur film imaginary
> by tracing how the visual structures of these works map localized
> microhistories rather than nationalized phantasmatic representations.
> These microhistories are not simply local, but are crisscrossed
> hybrids between the local and the global, between the psychic and
> political terrains (109).

The contrast between these 'localized microhistories' versus what she refers to as

'nationalized phantasmatic representations' structures the rest of the essay. These conceptual

categories are grounded by contrasts between three amateur films and academic debates around

the commercial art cinema, without reference to any specific film. The amateur films here

serve an ideological critique of nationalism, constantly emphasising their alterity to

professional products. As she notes, 'If professional film poses as the pinnacle, then amateur

film represents the nadir of art. If professional film is slick and seamless, then amateur film is

sloppy and filled with gaps and jump cuts.' (2001: 114). Here the focus is on the gap between

professional film aesthetics and the lack of technique to be found in home movies. This article

is an ambitious combination of geography and aesthetics, which absorbs and responds to the

debates on amateur film that have been put forward in various journals since the publication of

her monograph, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film,* in 1995. Specifically, this

article emerged in its original from a paper presented at a conference organised by Karen L.

Ishizuka, 'The Past as Present: Home Movies as a Cinema of Record'. A filmmaker and

curator of the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angles, Ishizuka has also written articles on home movies.[46] As the theme of the conference suggests, the organisers were interested in looking at home movies from what, in chapter one, I called the *evidential* perspective. While this once again re-enforces common perceptions about the function and possibilities of amateur film, it is interesting that at least in the published article, Zimmermann discusses one early amateur fiction film, *A Study in Reds* (1927, b&w/silent). Typically, amateur fiction films are often relegated to second-class status in archives, on television programmes and within scholarly debate. It is therefore a welcome development that they are now beginning to receive overdue attention.[47]

Now, to the larger issues of selection. During the course of her essay the focus moves from a consideration of localism, to explaining how amateur film fundamentally challenges established forms of film history. She asks, 'What happens when we move from a unified concept of film history toward ever morphing, evolving, contradictory processes of overlapping film histories?' (110). In this attempt to re-write conventional versions of film history, she looks to writers who are part of the move towards New Historicism, namely Keith Jenkins and Michel Foucault. Where there was once a highly selective film canon, there can now only be an infinity of multiple texts, defying all attempts to establish hierarchies. This is what she calls 'variegated practices': representing a variety or diversification of filmic forms (110). This approach chimes well with a variety of movements within contemporary scholarship such as postmodernism and the increased role of cultural studies. As she notes, 'Rather than finishing, this essay is perhaps, in the end, only an invocation for a beginning: to write the archive differently, and with difference and plurality as its major criteria for selection

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[46] See 'Artifacts of Culture', *Journal of Film Preservation*, issue 52, April 1996. pp.15-20 and 'The Home Movie: A Veil of Poetry' in Nancy Kapstein (ed.) *Jubilee Book: Essays on Amateur Film* (Belgium: Association Europeenne Inedits, 1997), pp. 45-50

[47] The conference, 'Amateur Fiction Films' at the Northeast Historic Film Archive, Maine, U.S.A, July 21st-23rd 2005, was a notable exception to the focus on non-fiction amateur film.

(128)'. In keeping with what has come to be known as post-history, looking for *difference* and *fragmentation* rather than continuity structures this analysis. Using these criteria of selection, the films chosen confirm what Zimmerman sees as the alterity of amateur film.

By contrast, films made within the restricted mode were surprisingly unified and consistent as a film practice, even over the course of the fifty-year time span between 1930 and 1980. Like the mainstream cinema it modelled itself on, apart from the introduction of sound and colour, the aesthetics of amateur film changed only in small ways over the years. The stylistic differences between cine-clubs and lone workers are more influenced by individual choices and preferences rather than technological determinants. Therefore I see the restricted mode of amateur cinema more as a homogenous and *parallel* film practice than has been acknowledged up until this point, existing not necessarily to challenge the mainstream, but to stage a *dialogue* with it.

As we have seen, the amateur film movement did introduce a number of genres that modelled themselves on professional practice. As Zimmermann explains:

> we begin to define amateur film itself as a range and plurality of practices: home movies, surveillance, fantasies, narratives, experimental works, travelogues, documentaries, industrials, hobbies, practice zone for Hollywood style, places for emergent subjectivities, sites of *resistance to nationalism and hegemony* (my emphasis) (110).

This quotation offers a key insight into the justification of localism within contemporary debate. Despite the exciting opening gambit that, 'These microhistories are not simply local, but are crisscrossed hybrids between the local and the global...', it finally emerges that localism is merely seen as an another form of cultural *resistance* to the forces of nationalism (109). Following all the allusions to 'plurality' and 'diversity', this is a disappointingly insular and defensive way of formulating a localist approach to film history. Zimmermann's article attempts to deconstruct nationalism and professionalism, a common critical strategy in Film

Studies, rather than explain this connection between the local and the national. Here I suggest that non-fiction and fiction amateur films provide fundamentally different perspectives on localism, visions that do not necessarily overlap. These debates will now be set in motion by a consideration of the operations of the sponsored film.

## The Sponsored Film and the Unfamiliar Gaze

Scotland had a particularly dynamic and integrated documentary film movement from 1954 to 1982 as a result of the initiatives taken by Forsyth Hardy and the second Films of Scotland committee. As director of Films of Scotland, Hardy oversaw projects on various aspects of Scottish life including fishing, new industries and the rich artistic culture of the nation. These films would then be distributed both in Scotland and abroad. Films such as *Seawards the Great Ships* (1960, 30 mins, colour/sound) were commissioned to show Scotland as a self-confident nation contributing to the industrial and cultural progress of Britain and the world. This can be seen in the voiceover to the opening sequence describing the geographical location of the shipyards:

> Britain is an island nation, a nation of islanders and ship builders. On its shores generations of craftsmen have made great ships for the world, but nowhere in such profusion as on the River Clyde in Scotland. The estuary of the Clyde is a place for pleasure, people write songs about its green hills and lochs and islands, and they come to find peace and enjoy the scenery.
>
> Greenock is a town on the Clyde, down these waters Clyde built clippers like the Cutty Sark once sailed to the China seas. It was then too that James Watt of Greenock was working on a steam engine that would change the face of the world. Up river, the ancient landmark of Dumbarton Rock has looked down on long ago battles. Today a voyage up this river is a voyage into the industrial age. There are still green fields on Clydeside but they have shrunk as the industry of the Clyde has spread. A river of shipyards. And of all shipbuilding rivers the Clyde is the most versatile in the world. It makes every kind of

ship; cargo ships, the bread and butter traders that feed and clothe the
world. Ships that cross all the waters of the globe…

In this section of the film, the narrator is keen to stress the inter-relationship between local industrial activity and its resulting global impact. The Glasgow shipbuilders were the focus of this film, but they were valued not in and of themselves, but because of what they contributed to Britain's place on the world stage. A token attempt was made, half-way through the film, to give these anonymous workers a voice. In one short scene, over shots of seagulls, the river and the shipyard, disembodied voices attempted to recreate lunchtime banter between three workers:

- I must have welded about a million tons of plate this morning
- The boy's got hallucinations again; it's the sun that gets him
- Oh look who's talkin', you couldnae weld a spoon to a tea can
- Oh is that your trade? I never tried it
- Come on…there's a ship to be welded
- Oh aye, work, work, work…

The contained informality of this scene contrasts sharply with the impersonal industrial processes of the rest of the film. However, there is a lingering feeling that these were not actual recordings of the workers, but actors 'performing' the working-class. Even here, where their labours are the focus of attention, the men are not allowed to speak for themselves, someone- the narrator- speaks for them.

The film went on to win the Academy Award for best live action short film in 1961. The poetic sensibility evident in the camera-work and editing, in capturing the fevered tempo of working life, immediately impresses. In this, the influence of American director Hilary Harris can surely be felt. Colin McArthur has chastised *Seawards the Great Ships* for presenting a misleading image of life in the shipyards, seeing it as a mythologizing of the industry, indulging in strong visual images at the expense of a thorough analysis of history and

class relations (1982b: 63). I do not intend to offer an ideological critique of this type; instead I see it as entirely typical of the sponsored documentary film movement, which also includes films such as *The Big Mill* (1963). It is not surprising that *Seawards the Great Ships* presents a romantic view of shipbuilding on the Clyde, given that it is, after all, a sponsored film. Sponsored filmmakers have no responsibility towards history, politics or aesthetics, their only responsibility being towards meeting their sponsor's wishes, which quite reasonably lie within the boundaries of successfully promoting a positive image of their brand and product. The financing of the project by the Clydeside shipbuilding industry clearly would have some influence over the finished film, and it needs to be noted that films such as these are *products* to be consumed within the marketplace of commercial cinemas. *Seawards the Great Ships* and other films of its type, were distributed internationally, so the film must acknowledge non-local spectators at the expense of the local audience. It needed to mediate between local and international concerns. This was made explicit by the commissioning of two different voice-overs, one with a Scots accent for the local audience and one in Received Pronunciation for international spectators.[48] In this film, the local is made 'strange' and exotic for the benefit of the *unfamiliar* gaze.


*The Amateur Film and the Familiar Gaze*


John Grierson not only had an influence on the sponsored film movement, but also on the amateur film as well. In 1949, he was interviewed by *Amateur Cine World*, to discuss the possibilities of this fledgling parallel film culture (Malthouse 1949: 150-153). He used this opportunity to address amateur filmmakers:

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[48] Bryden Murdoch provided the Scottish commentary, while Kenneth Kendall's voice was used in the English version.

> This is a challenge to all of you as local citizens. General
> information from a national point of view does not fill the gaps. It is
> up to the local amateur cinematographer to play his part and provide
> a local information service. You have a great power in your hands. It
> will be seen during the next decade that the amateur has a great duty
> to the people, since he can reach them in a way the national
> information film makers cannot hope to do. We have not the right
> sort of money at our disposal, and we do not know local conditions.
> The small film dealing with local interests is your medium (150).

So while sponsored films such as *Seawards the Great Ships* can represent the national perspective by suppressing localism, the amateur filmmaker can do the reverse: contribute to the national record by focusing on the local. In this sense, amateurism becomes culturally legitimate by encouraging active citizenship.

*Fit O' The Toon* (1978, 110 mins, colour/sound) was made by the Scottish amateur filmmaker Enrico Cocozza, who had previously made *Glasgow's Docklands* (1959) for the Films of Scotland series. *Fit O' The Toon* did not win any awards nor did it even find a wider audience through the Scottish amateur film movement. In this almost two-hour film Cocozza created an impression of a day in the life of the town he lived in, Wishaw, featuring scenes of everyday activity and interviews with passers-by he himself knew. The title means 'at the foot of the town', where Cocozza shoots most of the incidents in the film from his living room window. It is immediately striking in its use of Scots in the title, as well as its focus on a small town to the south of Glasgow, instead of a large city. Cocozza's voice-over attempts to set the scene:

> This film is an impression of the fit o' the toon in Wishaw, in the
> course of a day in late summer 1978. And you are going to see the
> following interesting people...(Cocozza then goes on to list a long
> litany of everyone who will appear in his film, recognising the
> importance of each individual by doing so)...not to mention many
> other charming people who live, work, serve, gamble, drink or play
> at the fit o' the toon...

Here, in contrast to the introduction in *Seawards the Great Ships*, the location seems to need no introduction: there is an assumption on the part of the filmmaker that the spectator already knows these people and places well, and can position them within the frame of his or her own experience. Nor is this film solely focused on people's working lives as it was in *Seawards the Great Ships*: in his interviews Cocozza also asks Wishavians how they spend their days, when they go shopping and so on. After a sequence showing bread and rolls being delivered to the bakery, accompanied by seventies funk music, he stops a sceptical looking pensioner:

> Cocozza: Are you always the first customer in the morning?
> Man: Well yes
> Cocozza: What time do you get up?
> Man: We're out seven o'clock
> Cocozza: Seven o'clock? You're not up nearly as early as me then?
> Man: Oh no
> Cocozza: No, and you're always down here first thing?
> Man: About first thing...
> Cocozza: For your rolls is it?
> Man: Rolls
> Cocozza: Very good. Do you enjoy your rolls then?
> Man: Certainly do
> Cocozza: That's lovely
> Man: (man tries to say something but Cocozza talks over him)
> Cocozza: Fine, fine. Oh well, we'll let you get your rolls then
> Man: Yes
> Cocozza: Fine

Immediately following this short exchange, the film cuts inside the bakery, where Cocozza asks the owner how his day tends to pan out. Here a connection is being drawn between the owners and the customers of the shop: the overall impression being created is that there is a dignity in the everyday. The filmmaker interacts with people and allows them to speak for themselves, unlike *Seawards the Great Ships*. Small businesses are the focus this time, instead of large industrial corporations with a strict division of labour. Compared to sponsored documentaries, this is less of a celebration and more of an impartial look at business practice.

After all, the small businessman did not employ him, therefore Cocozza did not have to promote this shop in the same way that a sponsored filmmaker would have to.

Amateur filmmakers found it much easier to move in and out of professional and leisure activity than sponsored filmmakers, and a different picture of life emerged from this. This tends to mean amateur films have a somewhat relaxed or meandering style and pacing. In *Fit O' The Toon* scenes and interviews do not have to add up to something larger than what they are: collages of places and people become important not for what they contribute to the national or international culture but for what they contribute to the imaginary local space. Benedict Anderson has described the national space as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991). Similarly, the local space is also a series of imagined communities, but with more closely imposed borders. This is an 'imagined community' not in a illusionary sense, but one agreed and conceived by the group of individuals introduced at the beginning of the film.

This very different way of looking at an apparently everyday world was possible because of the parallel film production and exhibition culture that helps to define amateur cinema. *Fit O' The Toon* was made with a small Super-8 camera, edited at home and shown in community spaces such as town halls and at screenings organised by other film societies and amateur cine-clubs. This active and highly localised exhibition network meant that the film could be seen by many people who would be interested in how it represented their own and neighbouring towns without ever being recognised by an international audience: this film was never mentioned in national or international newspapers or magazines, something that is often used as an indicator of a film's importance. Enrico Cocozza has preserved a time, a place, a way of life and people that have now changed or disappeared altogether, in many ways reminiscent of the stylistically different Margaret Tait film *A Place of Work*, made two years earlier in 1976, which similarly 'acknowledges its process of production' (Burch 1982: 31). With *Fit O' the Toon* there is no sense that you are looking in at these people and places from

an unfamilar perspective. A film such as this is *not a product* to be consumed by an international audience, so it need not mediate between local and international concerns. In this film, the local is made 'strange' for the *familiar* gaze.

Non-fiction films such as *Fit O' The Toon* therefore display an inward-looking vision of the nation: one that escapes most existing conceptions of national cinemas precisely because it does not address issues of nationalism and is not seen by a national audience. This corresponds with an important point made by Andrew Higson about the limitations of many nationalistic surveys:

> Historical accounts of national cinemas have too often been premised on unproblematised notions of nationhood and its production. The search for a stable and coherent national identity can only be successful at the expense of repressing internal differences, tensions and contradictions- differences of class, race, gender, region, etc (1989: 43).

As we have seen, the vision of internal difference, as popularised by amateur filmmakers has been repressed by accounts of the nation insensitive to issues of localism. However, it should be noted that localism and regionalism are not the same. The regional implies a centre of meaning through which everything else becomes merely peripheral. This regionalism is characteristic of the film archive movement, as Heather Norris Nicholson has noted (2001: 152-163). However, the great strength of amateur film production was that it could happen anywhere. Localism was a radically *de-centring* process where location can become vital, or just as equally, completely unimportant.

In these non-fiction films, place 'authorises' film-making, in that the films focus on space and the individuals who occupy it. The people who are found passing through this highly focused area are merely transitory passers-by, being caught up in a process of passing time that will exceed themselves. While many of the people in *Fit O' The Toon* may no longer live there

or even be alive, Wishaw still exists to be filmed by contemporary amateur filmmakers. Once completed, this hypothetical contemporary documentary would exist to be screened alongside earlier films about Wishaw, films where its status as 'A Film By Enrico Cocozza' takes on less importance than the fact that is a film *about* Wishaw.

In writing about the British professional feature films in the context of both increasing European harmonisation and globalisation, Mike Wayne outlines four categories of contemporary national film production: embedded films; disembedded films; cross-border films; and anti-national national films (2002: 33-72). The travel films written about by Heather Norris Nicholson could be seen as amateur cross-border films (2003: 152-65). However the other two categories have direct and immediate usefulness in relation to amateur filmmaking. Embedded films,

> are pitched primarily (although not exclusively) for the national market, either because the budgets (including the marketing budgets) for the films are not sufficiently high for there to be a reasonable expectation that it will gain profile abroad, and/ or because the cultural material which the film is dealing with has not had sufficiently successful prior circulation in the international market (Wayne: 41).

The low-budget nature of the production therefore lowers its cultural ambition. While in the context of professional feature filmmaking, embedded films tend to be comedies or small-scale dramas, the low or no budget amateur filmmaker will mostly gravitate towards newsreel and documentary filmmaking. Bert Hogenkamp and Mieke Lauwers explain this is the case 'because making them does not involve the organisational, financial and technical problems that are inherent in the feature film and the animated movie. In addition they are the most direct form of expression the amateur filmmaker can have.' (1997: 114) While the low-budget comedies and dramas often fail to travel beyond national boundaries, these newsreels and documentaries often fail to travel beyond the local space. In this sense a film such as *Fit O' the*

*Toon* is an example what I want to call *embedded localism*. This is a localism that is not necessarily insular; it just has not yet found the distribution needed to reach audiences elsewhere. As a filmmaking strategy non-fiction re-enforces the link between location and representation. However, this is *not* the case for amateur fiction films, as will become clear in the next case study.

## *Mediating the Local and the National Space*

While the amateur non-fiction films discussed above are defined by a strong sense of place, the fiction films that were also commonly produced by cine-clubs work against this form of localism, and were therefore not embraced by figures such as John Grierson. This is no accident, given that the amateur film festivals encouraged entrants from outside national boundaries. Publications such as *Amateur Cine World*, as the name of the journal suggests, were interested in cultivating a cosmopolitan film culture. In addition to the inward focused non-fiction films, amateur filmmakers were simultaneously keen to make films that could potentially interest audiences from beyond their immediate surroundings. Therefore, this section is devoted to looking at amateur films that display a more outward looking variant of localism. This will be explored in relation to one film in particular, the Edinburgh Cine Society production, *Seven Ages* (1957, 15 mins, b&w/sound).

The Edinburgh Cine and Video Society, which still exists at the time of writing, is one of the oldest cine-clubs in Britain. Its earlier incarnation as The Waverly Cine Society began in 1936. The club was re-named The Edinburgh Cine Society, only a year later, on the occasion of moving from rented rooms to new premises. This name persisted for over fifty years, until the advent of newer technologies eventually had to be recognised (Speirs 1996: 6-8). Unlike other cine-clubs, which were dominated by a few strong personalities, the Edinburgh Cine

Society, seems to have been able to practice a more collective form of filmmaking over a long period of time. Its continuing existence after the decline of the amateur cine movement is surely due to the dedication of a number of committed individuals. Zimmermann romanticises the European cine-clubs as being more overtly 'political' than their American counterparts, contrasting them unfavourably with the American Cinema League:

> The league ran yearly contests, circulated amateur films, and held exhibitions of work, a sort of Americanized, depoliticised, hobbyist version of the more avant-garde and politically orientated European cine clubs (2001: 119).

However, from the cases studies preceding this chapter, it is now clear that agitational amateur filmmakers were in the minority of cine societies, at least in Scotland. This misunderstanding is due to the highly selective scholarly writing that exists, rather than the empirical evidence available. In this sense, The Edinburgh Cine Society was firmly in the mainstream of the amateur film movement, producing both documentaries on local events as well as fiction films. These broad interests were also, as we saw, a feature of Clansman/Group 5 Productions in Aberdeen. Now that copies of nearly three hundred Edinburgh Cine Society films have been passed on to the Scottish Screen archive, work can now begin on assessing their significant contribution to amateur film culture. While general conclusions about this cine-club are beyond the reach of this chapter, the example of *Seven Ages* is useful for the analysis of localism attempted here.

*Seven Ages* is a short comedy based around a short quotation from William Shakespeare's play, *As You Like It*. This monologue, centres on the so-called seven ages of life in the following order: infant, schoolboy, lover, soldier, justice, pantaloon, and finally second childhood. These stages effectively represent a universal journey of life that most men will encounter. In its consideration of mortality and the circular nature of history, this could

potentially make for a sober drama. However, as directed by Ian Brock, *Seven Ages* manages to find comedy in the material it is loosely based on. By drawing on references that are universally recognisable, this film has resonance for viewers beyond Edinburgh, or even Britain. Here, the location of the film merely exists as a setting to other themes, unlike *Fit O' The Toon*, it is not important in and of itself. *Seven Ages* really could have been made anywhere, and that is precisely the point.

Following the credits, the satiric tone of the film is set early on. *Seven Ages* opens on a shot of a globe of the world spinning on its axis. Already it is clear from the use of the spinning globe, rather than a map of Edinburgh, that this is not a film about the Scottish capital city. When this movement is halted by the sudden intrusion of a hand into the frame, the story begins. The camera tilts up, through smoke we see someone dressed up as William Shakespeare: our guide through this story. His opening line, 'All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players' from *As You Like It* (Hattaway: 2/7), sets the scene for what follows. This is not an attempt to document reality, but rather a heightened theatrical version of life. While *Fit O' The Toon* attempted to represent one full day in Wishaw, by contrast *Seven Ages* attempts to account for the key moments in an everyman's life, albeit in a humorous way. The first scene in the story offsets these literary pretensions by showing an old man being thrown out of a pub as the narrator, John Piper, intones with mock profundity 'They have their exits…and their entrances', as the man stumbles into the public toilet. The grandeur of Shakespeare is here grounded in the bodily functions of an old man. The ironic contrast between literary culture and the burlesque is revealing of the tensions between aspiration and being modestly unserious, a tension that constantly haunts the amateur cine movement throughout the years.

The whole film demonstrates a particular enjoyment in mocking authority figures. The next scene shows a city gent, who is trying to impress a nurse with his natural affinity with

babies, being covered in sick for his troubles. Then the 'whining schoolboy' goes from being thrown out of the house, into the arms of the law. When the police drop him off at school, the schoolboy is shown sticking his tongue out at the officers. This is a far cry from the kind of civic amateur filmmaking Grierson endorsed.

While the early part of the film is economical and precisely rendered, later sequences take on a somewhat more surreal form. The courtroom scene is a case in point. Here the visuals once again undermine the deliberate portentousness of the narration. For example, when the judge enters and takes his position, it is announced, 'In fair round belly with good capon lined' the actor portraying the judge has made his character into a caricature by adding a rotund fake belly. 'With eyes severe and beard of formal cut' he is framed in a close-up as he looks sternly over his glasses at the accused who is the same man thrown out of the pub at the beginning of the film. 'Full of wise saws and modern instances' the judge addresses the chamber (although we do not hear what he says); the whole courtroom suddenly erupts in laughter in an unexpected manner. A policeman even nudges the accused man to laugh, and then he too joins in. 'And though he plays his part' the camera zooms in on the book in front of the judge to reveal that he is actually reading a comic strip about teachers which bears strikingly resemblance to the *The Dandy*, a famous Scottish comic. This is burlesque comedy in its more serious sense: making fun of institutions and the people appointed to uphold their values.

While the satire is frequently rendered with conviction, technically there seems to be less cohesion than is perhaps evident from the above description. The courtroom episode is bizarre for its unexplained laughter, but the soldier sequence makes some incongruous juxtapositions that seem to point towards problems in execution rather than any deliberate eccentricity. Quite simply, it seems as if the sequence is being improvised as they go along. The movement from a soldier being attacked by 'natives' from the trees, then fighting in the bushes where they find an annoyed golfer, before ending up with the soldier being shot by a

canon, is the most extreme example of this seeming improvisation. However this does point to a wider tension within amateur film culture: the desire to make a film that is technically accomplished is frequently undermined by poor execution of certain scenes. As Zimmermann explains:

> Amateur films more often than not lack form, structure, style, and a coherence of normative visual tropes, precisely because they occupy psychic realms and psychic fantasies that are themselves unformed and forming. These various "lacks" and "insufficiencies," if you will, are exactly what make the amateur film such a complicated social document, where the larger political world collides with psychic terrains, where invisibility vies with visibility (2001: 112).

This quotation, written with the example of home movies in mind, nonetheless highlights a tendency also applicable to most amateur fiction films. While amateur film has variously been described as 'primitive cinema' or 'artistically inchoate works', this aesthetic of 'lacks' is more appropriate for home movies, than films that have been made for the restricted mode, such as *Seven Ages* (112 & 113). However, these amateur film scripts were often not fully worked out, leaving some gaps to be improvised on the set. Since the financial pressures of professional productions do not haunt the amateur film set to the same degree, there can be more room for improvisation amongst the amateur actors. This extra forward planning means that films made for the restricted mode were less likely to be 'unformed and unforming' than home movies were. These more elaborate productions, which have some sense of the overall narrative, coupled with improvisation, can more accurately be described as having *semi-formed and unforming* production histories.

Amateur films need to be seen as existing *in dialogue* with professional fiction films. This is a response from the ground: where appreciation of commercially defined culture informs production. The parallel between non-fiction amateur film and the popularity of *local histories* also seems particularly useful here. Local histories are valued greatly by people who

have direct lived experience of the area, but have little interest for people from other areas. They are written by amateur historians and exist in parallel to the national and international histories in circulation from professional historians. Local histories do not need to justify their existence within the international space, they address an audience for whom the very specific geography the book focuses on has a special meaning, a meaning that more supposedly 'important' histories could never have for them personally. These works are usually published by the regional press and distributed in a semi-formal way. Amateurs write local histories, for a readership within the immediate community of a restricted, but not an exclusive audience. In the same way, amateur non-fiction filmmaking tried to capture the everyday life of people that would not be deemed important enough to be recorded in the national or international space. The *everyday* becomes significant by the very introduction of the amateur filmmakers' camera. While non-fiction amateur films are informed by local histories, amateur fiction films can be seen as synonymous with the cultural practices of local *theatre*, as the use of the term 'film play' demonstrates. Just as local theatre responds to national events and adapts them into the vernacular of the audience, so amateur fiction films perform a similar role within amateur cinema. This form of theatrical adaptation, from what tend to be amateur director and actors is what distinguishes amateur theatre from its professional counterparts. Like amateur fiction film, this is usually not a critical response to mass produced popular culture; often its tone is parodic or approving, as was seen in the examples of *Fickle Fortune* (Bearsden Film Club, 1930), *Ad Infernum Buddy* (Enrico Cocozza, 1952) as well as the action films made by Group 5. Here the 'local' becomes a fictional space for not only for criticism, but also for comment and celebration.

While amateur fiction films such as *Seven Ages* feature many elements that give away their geographical origins, such as the pubs and shops of Edinburgh or the soldier with the Scottish flag, in general amateur fiction films made for the restricted mode do not emphasise

their locations in the same way as amateur non-fiction films. The locations in both home movies and in amateur fiction films are mostly irrelevant to the stories that are told. Rather than being the main focus of investigation, as the town of Wishaw was in *Fit O' the Toon*, Edinburgh instead merely becomes the background to the unfolding narrative of *Seven Ages*. These are amateur films which attempt to suppress their cultural origins in order to appeal to audiences elsewhere. This has clear overlaps with what Mike Wayne describes as 'disembedded' British professional films, such as *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1993) or *Bean: The Ultimate Disaster Movie* (1997):

> These are the films which have the budgets and the cultural potential to succeed...The cultural material which they exploit in doing this are, as we have seen, the repertoire of national imagery that has already been achieved or may achieve wide circulation in the international market. It is in this sense that the films are disembedded from the national context (2002: 42).

*Notting Hill* (1999) and *Love, Actually* (2003) are more recent examples of disembedded British film designed to incorporate cultural material that would be easily exported to the American and international market. Wayne continues by noting that 'there is a real sense in which images designed for international consumption find it difficult to be attuned to the social specificities and diversities of national life.' (42) We found this with *Seawards the Great Ships*, in which images of Scotland were designed for the unfamiliar gaze of the international marketplace. While amateur films were not made for consumption to the same extent, there were still similar processes of cultural masking happening at the level of the local. Amateur fiction films that aspired to national or international consciousness, beyond their immediate surroundings, conform to what I want to call *disembedded localism*. Amateur fiction films required more resources, both financial and in terms of personnel, to achieve access to audiences from other parts of the country and the world. From a practical perspective, entering

these fiction films into amateur film festival both nationally and abroad did this. In Britain, the winners of *Amateur Cine World's* Ten Best film contest, which was held every year from 1936 to 1984 at the National Film Theatre in London, were packaged together and distributed as a feature for regional film theatres around the country and abroad. The winners of this contest often drew on recognised film genres in order to be culturally universal. Amateur films that were *disembedded* had a much greater chance of being seen by a wider audience. This was the case then and it remains the case now, in relation to potential access to amateur films through the both the archive and the internet. However, regional archives have tended to focus their promotional activity on embedded non-fiction films, which have a cultural capital that tax payers and funding bodies understand, a value that currently eludes amateur fiction films.

*Conclusion*

As these case studies on both non-fiction and fiction amateur films have shown, localism should no longer be synonymous with parochialism. This popular culture crafted by filmmakers from all over the country, displays a simultaneous awareness of both the local and the national space. The categories of *embedded localism* and *disembedded localism* have been introduced to enable a more precise understanding of this often-complex process.

However, it should be noted that these 'are not mutually exclusive categories; films can occupy more than one category' (Wayne 2002: 40). Therefore it is possible to imagine future studies that complicate the framework that I have suggested here. However, the fact that these categories developed for the study of commercial cinema, could with slight modifications, be so easily transferred to the amateur sector demonstrates once again the relatively *mainstream* nature of the films produced by both lone workers and cine-clubs.

# Conclusion

'Of course, facts and documents are essential to the historian. But do
not make a fetish of them.'

(Carr 1987: 19)

The following represents some reflections on what has been achieved by this thesis, as well as suggestions as to how this work could be developed in the near future. One of the ambitions of this work was to fuse empirical, theoretical and more general aesthetic concerns. Ultimately each of these methodologies has a bearing on the others, but here as in the thesis, they have been separated for purposes of analysis. Therefore it is only appropriate that these issues are dealt with in a sequential order. These observations then give way to a short consideration as to how these issues have a bearing on the status of amateur film within the academy. However, the interconnected nature of these approaches once again becomes evident in the *overlapping* terms of reference; as it was in the preceding chapters, and so it is in this conclusion.

## *Empirical Limits*

Since this project began over three years ago, a number of developments have taken place that have made this thesis less comprehensive than it initially seemed. My research on this area of study began in the Scottish Screen archive long before the National Lottery copying project transformed their collection of amateur films that are available for the researcher to view. Therefore, this thesis has been defined by access to a *limited* amount of material. However, while the empirical research could now certainly be widened, the theoretical conclusions are arguably relevant to future studies, both local and international.

While most scholarly work on amateur film has centred stubbornly on analysis of films produced within the 'home mode', in this thesis I have attempted to sketch an outline of film works that comprise what I am calling the *restricted mode* in Scotland. Over a fifty-year time span, from the early 1930s to the late 1970s I have found that Scotland was home to a highly active cine-club culture that was intimately tied to the film society movement. Films made within the context of Scotland's cine-club culture, which subsequently found their way into the national archive, suggest that the amateur film movement had an ambivalent relationship to inherited professional standards.

In general, films made by lone worker amateurs tended to be documentaries on local subject matter, displaying the lack of technical competence normally associated with home moviemakers. However by contrast, cine-club productions covered numerous genres, providing evidence of the fundamentally divided nature of amateur film production. On the one hand there were the documentaries of local topics, but on the other there were the fiction films that aspire to more universal concerns. This divided ontology demonstrates that amateur cinema is an autonomous film practice, *and* a parasitic film practice. These conclusions, developed with the context of Scottish amateur cinema, have potential resonance for studies beyond these borders.

*Opening Out This Thesis*

As this study progressed it quickly became apparent that the national paradigm is not especially helpful in analysing this material. While some films did comment on issues or topics unique to Scotland, most cine-club films display more affinities with *international* film

movements, both professional and amateur. The research into the national as well as international organisations that governed the amateur cine movement is on-going, but it is clear that there was a constant tension between centralised policy and dispersed production practices which were never resolved. Therefore, it is best to see Scotland as part of British and European amateur cine culture more generally.

As noted in the introduction of this thesis by both Frank Marshall and Janet McBain, Scotland had a particularly active amateur film culture precisely because of the tension between localised film production around the country and centralised organisations and events such as the Scottish Amateur Film Festival. Despite the fact that amateur film production was so geographically dispersed, without the guidance of the Scottish Association of Amateur Cinematographers, the films made by such groups would only be incorporated into local knowledge. As the Scottish Association of Amateur Cinematographers had the foresight to establish a collection of prints of S.A.F.F prizewinners, which were later passed on to what was then known as the Scottish Film Archive, these films are now in a position to be assessed by researchers. It is interesting that it is difficult to turn local knowledges into national or international histories without the aid of national bodies. This tension will no doubt continue to haunt future research into the amateur film movement.

Frank Marshall's short article alludes to the importance of U.N.I.C.A for the policy makers in amateur cinema culture, with special reference to the meeting in Glasgow in 1951. This demonstrates the international co-operation that was necessary to establish cultural links beyond national borders. At the moment it is difficult to discern the practical benefits that organisations such as U.N.I.C.A brought to amateur cinema. It seems that the celebration of amateur film at annual film festivals was not unique to Scotland; the international cultural exchange through film festivals such as the Cannes Amateur Film Festival or the Stockholm Amateur Film Festival, is therefore an area of research waiting to be addressed. This would

mean that the study of amateur film would have to move beyond its current reliance on individual archives, as represented by a study such as this, towards *comparative* studies between archives both regional and international. Only then will the trends and tendencies of the movement as a whole become clearer.

From a more local context, a number of the case studies making up this thesis have highlighted how Scotland needs to be seen as a part of *British* amateur film culture. This was especially notable in the fiction films of Norman McLaren, Enrico Cocozza and Group 5, which were discussed in chapters two and three. These *disembedded* films tended to do well in the annual Ten Best competition held at the National Film Theatre in London and were subsequently written about in the pages of *Amateur Cine World*. Researching these films therefore became relatively straightforward compared to the non-fiction films that were the focus of chapters four and five. By comparison these *embedded* films rely heavily on oral histories from eyewitnesses. For the disembedded films at least, the Institute of Amateur Cinematographers, which was founded in 1932, performed much the same role for Britain as a whole that the S.A.C.C did for Scotland. It had the foresight to collect and preserve the prints of films that did well in the Ten Best competition. This collection has recently been passed onto the East Anglican Film Archive; therefore a similar project to this one could now be feasibly carried out for the British amateur cine movement. This project could now be set in motion, but there is very little research energy currently being invested in films made within *the restricted mode*. One can only hope that this is beginning to change.

## *Amateur Cinema as an Object of Scholarly Enquiry*

This project has been intimately concerned with how to theorise local film production within a national framework. It should now be clear that amateur cinema does not provide an

*alternative* view of the nation. This is more a creation of critical theory than a feature of the films themselves. When scholars have used these films as part of studies with only incidental interest in issues of amateurism, they tend to position the amateur as being in a wilful struggle with the ideologies associated with professionalism. In the pages of these studies, the amateur begins to resemble the *shadow side* of the professional: where the professional represents hard work and craft, the amateur is constructed as lacking these very qualities. For example, this contrast is in evidence in an example cited by Hogenkamp and Lauwers: D. Knegt referring to the amateur as 'altruistic', as opposed to the 'egotistical' professional (Hogenkamp and Lauwers: 114). While this is certainly true of the contrast between the feature film and the typical home movie, things are more ambiguous in the lone-worker and cine-club film made for general audiences. When the amateur *fiction* film is brought into the equation, things become even less clear-cut. Fiction films have been pushed to one side in trying to establish the study of amateur film as a legitimate object of study. This is perfectly understandable but ironically, it means that scholars within film studies underestimate the potential richness of the amateur cine movement in regard to possible research projects. These fiction films are precisely the kinds of films that can be taught to students in classrooms across the country. However, scholars have not seen it this way over the past couple of decades. The amateur fiction film is always ignored in favour of films with little aesthetic value. While most cine-clubs divided their time between making documentaries on local subject matter, many clubs made fiction films that also display a distinctive amateur aesthetic. Hopefully in the years to come these fiction films be as culturally valued as the amateur films of record currently are.

As we have seen from the variety of films discussed in this thesis, the 'amateur' is a very elusive category. From *Hell Unltd* to *Around Wick Harbour 1974/75*, from *Fit O'The Toon* to *Seven Ages*, the difficulty in making an overarching statement about these diverse films comes to the fore. While generalisations can be made about mode of production (such as

the difference between lone-workers and cine-clubs) it is much more difficult to describe the generic practices of amateur cinema in such broad terms.

Within this thesis a number of genres common to amateur film culture have been identified. These include genres with professional equivalents, such as animation, fantasy films, comedies and action films. From close analysis of the resulting films, it became clear that they were not mere copies of professional products, but instead they displayed a much more ambivalent attitude to working within these genres. However, some distinctly amateur genres have also emerged, including club/community films, posterity productions and amateur remakes. These distinctly amateur genres are an important find. It suggests that the researcher should not just limit their studies to genres that are already firmly established in the study of commercial cinema, but they should also be on the lookout for genres that are unique to the amateur sector. Judging by articles in the amateur film journals, many more amateur genres were in process among practitioners in this amateur sector that have now been forgotten. Therefore, a definitive list of the generic practices of amateur cinema is still to be completed.

From a distance, it is now clear that this focus on the interaction between mode of production and the formation of generic practices has produced a relatively *static* study of the amateur film movement in Scotland. My concern with addressing the reductive nature of empirical writing on amateur film which focuses only on the *domestic*, the *oppositional* and the *evidential* perspectives, as well as only amateur non-fiction film generally, has made these theoretical interventions necessary. However, there are tensions within this thesis as a whole, which perhaps reflects the early nature of this work. Chapters one and six offered a *synchronic* view of amateur film that book-ended the thesis and provided the pivotal arguments of the study. Like Richard Chalfen, within these chapters I have been concerned with establishing the *structures* of the mode of production I am describing. In this sense, I have attempted to explain how the exhibition of amateur film has influenced the films that are produced. Having

established the restricted mode as an object of enquiry, I went on to have a closer look at the material that was produced for this semi-public space.

The eight case studies in chapters two, three, four and five, offered examples with more complex *diachronic* changes than these abstract frameworks allowed for. Therefore room still exists for empirical studies of how films made within the restricted mode, both fiction and non-fiction, changed and adapted over the period of fifty years. The study of amateur film within the restricted mode could therefore be pushed in a much more ambitiously diachronic direction. What these individual case studies demonstrate is that the amateur mode of production was certainly *not static* from the early 1930s to the late 1970s, and is much more *fluid* than these theoretical models suggest. One can now imagine not only a more complete history of the restricted mode, but also histories of each of the generic practices identified in this thesis. For example, it should one day be possible to attempt a history of the amateur art cinema, the film play, the community film and the heritage picture. Here they have been identified, but much work remains to be done on the *cultural* and *social* reasons why these genres were popular in certain decades, but became minority activities in others. I have touched on some of my early thoughts as to why these changes occurred, within some of these case studies, but this remains work that is far from complete. Once these sorts of questions start to be addressed, the study of amateur film within the university will have truly moved from its early to its mature phase.

*General Threads*

As the study of amateur film moves from its almost exclusive focus on non-fiction material, it becomes clear that rather than offering an alternative view of the nation, the amateur sector instead offers a *supplementary* or *parallel* one. The term 'alternative' implies a cultural

combativeness that is largely absent from most amateur films, which tend to have no ambition to challenge cultural hegemony. The desire on the part of film scholars to find this long lost 'alternative' amateur film tradition has meant that pre-defined interests have misrepresented the amateur film movement as a whole. Often these amateur films will have more of a family resemblance to mainstream cinema practices, than anything from the canon of the radical avant-garde. Film historians who have an open mind about this object of enquiry will find their curiosity rewarded tenfold when they discover an article or film that defies all previous expectations. These seemingly idiosyncratic discoveries often turn out to be much more representative and telling than they may appear at the time. It is in the study of such films, that our knowledge of this largely unexplored domain is truly pushed forward.

As part of this effort to build a more honest picture of the amateur film movement, it is vital that the dialogue between scholars and archivists continues in a much more substantial way that it has been the case. So far scholarly enquiry into this topic has been disappointing: lacking in imagination and just as importantly, evidence. Into this academic void the archivist community have endeavoured to lead the way. However, despite their best efforts, these excursions often leave us with a feeling of déjà vu: taking us to places we feel we have been to before. This need not be the case. The theoretical debates offered in this thesis have been written in an effort to guide future researchers away from the familiar and obvious, towards the unfamiliar and intriguing. Hopefully this spirit will also inform the archivists who can guide people to this material, even when they cannot quite articulate what they are looking for. This slight shift in the priorities of scholars studying amateur film re-establishes the connection between print and filmic evidence. The opening out of this debate, incorporating films that have been excluded from most studies over the years, promises to bring many unknown rewards. This thesis is offered as a small step in that direction.

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