

ON TRAVEL FILM AESTHETICS

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A staple subgenre of the home movie is the travel film. These films follow families to locations both exotic and mundane, to theme parks, to monuments, and to historic sites. Much of the collection of Super 8 home movies gathered by Roberto Ariganello can be classified as travel films, not only because of their content showcasing the grounds of Sea-World, Disneyland, and white sand beaches, but also because of their aesthetics. Travel films, in general and as exemplified in Ariganello's collection, are comprised of eye-level handheld shots featuring spontaneous, unconscious camera movement. One of the hallmarks of travel films is panning camera movement as the operator attempts to capture as much of a location or event as possible. Panning from side to side, sometimes multiple times in a surveillance-like maneuver, can be interrupted in beautiful moments of inspiration or interest. The filmmaker is typically experiencing what they are witnessing for the first time and reacting in the moment. Since home movies are generally left unedited after being developed, this sensation of the filmmaker experiencing a place or event for the first time is maintained when projected.

The spontaneity and energy found in travel films persists even in the case of orphaned films that are robbed of their original context. However, the way in which we engage with orphaned travel films dramatically differs from their original modes of exhibition. Travel films were typically shared in domestic settings for other family members or friends to relive the experiences of those who shot the footage. Screenings were typically accompanied by narrated explanations of what was on screen along with anecdotes to colour in further detail. Watching



orphaned travel films today, as we see with Ariganello's anonymous collection, there is a distinct lack of context which generates a beguiling, mysterious quality to the images. We are left to decipher meaning and context through clues pointing to where in time or space the images are arriving from. We travel along with the filmmaker from moment to moment, our eyes drawn to details on the screen, guided by the spontaneous camera movement. Watching anonymous travel films today is an experience closer to how the films were made than how they were previously shown. We are seeing places that may be unrecognizable to us due to the passing of time, experiencing them for the first time, just as the filmmaker did when they aimed their camera.