Re-examining Rural Representations
in Contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand Documentary

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Abstract

Documentary film enacts a particular viewing position, which enlists spectators in what Elizabeth Cowie describes as the desire to see and know the world through its recorded sights and sounds of reality. This thesis re-examines representations of rural life, as articulated by a recent cycle of Aotearoa New Zealand documentary films. Throughout my examination, I will address theories of rural mythology, identity construction and documentary representation. I will argue that my set of documentaries engage spectators in desiring to know and experience a particular view of rural life that may, however, only be a fantasy, or indeed, what Roland Barthes has described as a myth.

From 19th century European settlement to the contemporary era, the representation of rural life has been driven by the desire for ‘the great rural way of life’ that has been repeatedly negotiated through mythical structures. For example, settler propaganda characterised Aotearoa New Zealand as a ‘rural Arcadia’ where happy families could live and work together in harmony with nature. Excluded from representation were the realities of conflict within colonisation, such as conflicting claims to land, as well as racial and social class issues. I will explore variations upon these myths of rural life as represented in the films Kaikohe Demolition (2004), The Last Resort: God Defend Our Free Land (2006), Land of the Long White Cloud (2009), and This Way of Life (2009). I will read these films as expressions of a desire for access to and ownership of rural land, framed within the present-day contexts of globalisation and neoliberalism. I will also explore how romanticised images of an idyllic existence within nature have come to hold a particular appeal for a largely urban population unsettled by the neoliberal reforms and rural downturn of the 1980s, as well as the flows and displacements of global capitalism. I propose that it is because Aotearoa New Zealand has always imagined its national identity as rural, that as it becomes more urbanised and globalised it paradoxically engages in more intensified mythic productions of its essentially rural identity – an internal process of what I term ‘ruralisation’, in response external forces of globalisation.
Acknowledgements

He aha te mea nui o te ao?
He tangata! He tangata! He tangata!
What is the most important thing in the world?
It is people! It is people! It is people!

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INTRODUCTION: Re-examining Rural Representations

Documentary is a representation of reality. A representation of the world that we already occupy. It stands for a particular view of the world, one we may have never encountered before even if the aspects of the world that is represented are familiar to us (Nichols 20).

Documentary, in its attempt to record reality, is both a representation of a world we already occupy (and whose reality we as spectators already take for granted) and a particular view upon a world we may have never encountered but which is nevertheless represented as familiar to us. The tension that Bill Nichols describes here identifies the problematic with which my set of documentaries engages. The longer historical project of representing Aotearoa New Zealand from 19th century settlement onwards is driven by a tension that has always been negotiated through mythical structures. I will draw upon a selection of work from a set of key theorists of myth, primarily Roland Barthes and Claudia Bell, to examine this tension, and elaborate on the recurrence of certain rural myths that inform expressions of national identity in Aotearoa New Zealand. My films all in different but related ways assert a strong rural identity (which I will term ‘rurality’) even though Aotearoa New Zealand is a highly urbanised nation. Nichols’ reflection cuts right to the problem of representing ‘ruralness’ within the current world we already occupy which is urban, through a mythologised rural world that we perceive as familiar and as our contemporary reality.

Rural mythologies continue to inform expressions of Aotearoa New Zealand’s national identity within representational media, although the majority of its citizens live and work in urban towns and cities, and despite the fact that the overwhelming audience for these films is urban and international. With regard to my set of films, the manifestation of certain myths about rural life that position it as the authentic way of life connect back to the socio-historical processes that attended colonial settlement, and are overlaid with what I will explore as the unsettling processes of contemporary globalisation and neoliberalism. In the
first case, Victorian-era bourgeois ideologies pertaining to land proprietorship that informed the first European settlement of Aotearoa New Zealand continue to shape perceptions of rural life. In the second case, romanticised images of an authentic existence on the coast and in the countryside hold a particular appeal for a largely urban contemporary population unsettled by the flows and displacements of global capitalism.

For example, Jock Phillips asserts that Aotearoa New Zealand’s rural coast and countryside has long been mythologised as “a new Garden of Eden”, and its citizens characterised as resilient “pioneering people of the land” (1). However, records from the New Zealand Official Yearbook 2012 confirm that over 86% of the population is urban-based.¹ Urban growth and the emergence of a vibrant urban culture in the last half-century are largely a reflection of the realities of economic and social transformation throughout key historical eras. For example, the rural downturn of the 1980s was a direct result of State economic policies that included the removal of agricultural subsidies. This led to a decline in rural commerce, which also coincided with a rise in urban development. Even so, Aotearoa New Zealand continues to be represented as primarily a thriving rural nation through everything from tourism websites and postage stamps to its national cinema. The most important perception that the representation of rural life within my film set supports is that this ‘great way of life’ still exists and is accessible within Aotearoa New Zealand.

In their reproduction of certain rural myths, my documentaries engage spectators in the desire to know and see a romanticised, pre-urbanised Aotearoa New Zealand. In this way, the representation of these myths exemplifies Elizabeth Cowie’s argument that documentaries engage spectators in desiring to see (scopophilia) and to know (epistephilia) the world through “recorded images and sounds of reality” (1). I will argue that my set of documentaries engage spectators in desiring to see and know a particular point of view of rural life that may only be a fantasy, or indeed a myth.

¹ The New Zealand Official Yearbook 2012 recorded Aotearoa/New Zealand as one of the most highly urbanised countries in the world, with 86 percent of its population living in urban areas.
Rural Myths, Identity Construction, Documentary Representation

‘Rural mythology’, ‘identity construction’, and ‘documentary representation’ are all recurring terms within my thesis. They also organize the structure of my literature review and theoretical discussion in the following chapter. It will be useful to define some key terms that inform my analysis here at the outset.

I explicate the term ‘rural mythology’ with reference to Barthes’ definition of myth as a socially constructed reality that is naturalised and perpetuated through media and popular culture. His methodology combines “an ideological critique” of the language of popular culture together with a semiotic analysis of “the mechanics of this language” (Barthes 9). Barthes asserts that myth attaches certain connotative meanings to representations that are subsequently mistaken as literal denotations. For example, during colonial settlement mythical language operated within representation and writings intended for prospective settlers. Bell describes how settler agents promoted Aotearoa New Zealand as “a land of opportunity” which targeted capitalist investors (whose money enhanced the nation’s development) and the labouring classes (whose skills were required for nation-building) (146). Romanticised representations of the Aotearoa New Zealand landscape connoted an idyllic way of life implying (in a literal sense) that it was accessible in one form or another to all settlers. Barthes explains that myth operates through this interplay of connotation appearing as denotation, whereby “its intent is somehow frozen, purified, eternalized, made absent by this literal sense” (124). Bell points out that “any off-putting information” was excluded from representation (146). This included the fact that this so-called “land of opportunity” was already occupied (146). Diverging realities were concealed from the settler in favour of advancing what Bell describes as the “‘follow the dream’ model of colonization”, which carried forward the desires of British class aspirations such as the possibility of rural land proprietorship (146). In the present socio-historical world, a comparable dream of coastal or rural land ownership, which describes the quintessence of the “Kiwi Dream”, is becoming harder, if not impossible, to grasp (Phillips 5). Now there is a double concealment within the myths of the nation’s settlement: a concealment that the land was already occupied in settlement, and that it is still open to all citizens.
Through my discussion of films, I will elaborate three recurring and interrelated rural myths: ‘the great rural way of life’, ‘taming nature’, and ‘rural Arcadia’. These rural myths conspire in their promotion of rural life as an authentic and desirable way of life. Yet, at the same time, there is an internal tension between these myths in terms of what they signify. I have adopted these three myths based upon Bell’s account of the “early New Zealand pioneer-in-nature myth” which, I argue, operates through a Barthesian mythical structure (147). In so doing I identify a master myth for my discussion which I refer to generally as the great rural way of life. This myth connotes a morally and physically superior way of life in the countryside, and stretches back from the present historical moment to the way that Aotearoa New Zealand was promoted to the first waves of early European settlers. Myths of rural Arcadia and taming nature constitute its sub-myths. Each has its distinct significations, yet expresses different versions of controlling nature. The rural Arcadia myth is the more genteel version as it connotes an idyllic pastoral paradise, and as Bell describes, one that has already been “cultivated and domesticated by human effort” (147). In contrast, the taming nature myth connotes the use of “heroic physical prowess”, “sturdy independence” and hard “honest toil” to transform the wilderness into European measures of land productivity (147). In 1857, Charles Hursthouse identified how depictions of the taming nature myth appealed particularly to masculine sensibilities: “The feeble-minded, the emasculate, the fastidious, the timid, do not emigrate... It is the strong and the bold who go forth to subdue the wilderness and conquer new lands” (qtd. in Phillips 2).2 This notion of taming new lands, as described by Hursthouse, obscured the fact that the land was already occupied. In this example we see that myth operates through signification and exclusion. Mythical representation of the great rural way of life privileged “the good moral character assumed in those who worked so physically hard” and suppressed any “politically or racially questionable behaviors” that might have impeded the project of nation-building (147). The complex ways in which these myths relate to one another will be explored in the following chapters. I will examine these rural myths, which also impact upon other structures of identity and belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand, as they manifest within the worlds of my set of films.

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2 For more on this see Hursthouse’s New Zealand, or Zealandia, the Britain of the South.
The paradox of identity is that its critical definition is primarily based upon one’s own understanding of what one is not. This agrees with James Liu’s assertion that social ‘identity construction’ is reliant upon “knowing what groups one belongs to, and this requires an understanding of what groups one does not belong to” (69). Two key factors that influence the social construction of cultural identities in Aotearoa New Zealand are biculturalism (intranationally) and globalisation (internationally). Biculturalism, which implies a unified agreement between Māori and Pākehā, is a relatively recent mode of national identification. It emerged in the last half of the 20th century, as part of a State-led movement to reconstruct the Treaty of Waitangi as “the foundational document of modern nationhood” and yet it retains a contentious status within the nation, especially in relation to unsettled Treaty claims (Liu et al. 13). Within my set of films, bicultural conflict between Māori and Pākehā manifests through the identity politics articulated within the current foreshore and seabed debate. What also emerges through this debate is the perceived threat from foreign interest in the rural land and water of Aotearoa New Zealand. Liu et al. claim that globalisation “brings people together... in both harmony and conflict” (11). My analysis shows that the rural subjects of my films view globalisation as a source of disharmony, as well as a key threat to sustaining their “Kiwi Dream” (Phillips 5).

Both factors, biculturalism and globalisation, inform how identities have been historically patterned throughout ongoing settlement and, as such, they present themselves for examination in my thesis. I will draw upon the work of Avril Bell, as well as Stephen Turner, to explore the socio-historical factors that frustrate bicultural cohesion, and produce a sense of displacement with land and identity within the present era of globalisation. For example, I will discuss how the contemporary on sale of rural land and water to foreign investment collides with the settler desire to forget that this land was appropriated from Māori during colonisation. I will argue that myths of identity and belonging embedded within my set of films operate to project a bicultural alliance and mask a contemporary sense of displacement with rural land and water. Furthermore, I claim that unsettled issues between each ‘Bicultural Other’ (Maori/Pakeha) are now displaced onto current issues with the ‘Globalising Other’ (foreign investors).
In exploring the link between documentary representation and desire, I draw upon a selection of work by Cowie and Nichols. Cowie extends Nichols’ claim that documentaries “stimulate epistephilia (a desire to know) in their audiences” to propose that they also engage a related scopophilic desire to see (40). I argue that it is the filmmakers’ selected and ordered subjective representation of reality, or what John Grierson defines as “the creative treatment of actuality” (qtd. in Nichols 6), that satisfies this combined desire to see and know a certain ‘ruralised’ or rural-centric view of the world on screen.3 In this way, Aotearoa New Zealand’s urbanisation fuels the spectators’ desire for its ruralisation. I use the term ‘ruralisation’ to name the way that as Aotearoa New Zealand becomes more urban it desires increasingly to imagine itself as rural. This is because the access to rurality is so historically embedded into the imagining of the nation.

Motivation

In the first decade of the new millennium, during which my set of films was produced, public and political debates emerged over rival claims to the foreshore and seabed, which also connected to unresolved issues of land and national identity. As Liu et al. posit, “The facts of history are the bare bones of nationhood: it is in the fleshing out of facts into narratives of meaning that a people are forged” (13). While myths, like ideology, have no specific authors, they do constitute the taken for granted naturalised narratives that filmmakers then reproduce and represent. Documentary is, therefore, a particularly apt form in which to study social myths. As Nichols reminds us, documentary represents a view of the world whose reality we take for granted, but importantly, like the process of history described by Liu et al., documentary always fleshes out (narrativises) the bare bones (facts) in its creative reproduction of mythic structures from our everyday lives. Nichols corroborates Cowie as he describes the pleasures of documentary spectatorship:

The pleasure and appeal of documentary film lies in its ability to make us see timely issues in need of attention, literally. We see

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3 For more on Grierson’s definition of documentary, see “The Documentary Producer.”
views of the world, and what they put before us are social issues and cultural values, current problems and possible solutions, actual situations and specific ways of representing them (ix).

I am motivated to explore the unresolved social issues and cultural values pertaining to land and identity as articulated by my film set. The ‘issues in need of attention’ relative to representations of a national rurality will be examined through the naturalised mythical structures that recur in my sample of films.

**Methodology**

I plan to engage a textual analysis of Barthesian mythical structures operative within my set of contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand documentaries. The relation between rural mythologies and the social construction of cultural and national identities connects back to the first waves of Māori and European migration. According to Liu et al., accounts of early Māori voyages, “reveal planned and multiple migration” (12). Over time, these groups of first settlers adjusted to the natural environment, and “a new culture emerged over centuries of relative isolation” (12). Māori settlers cleared forests, cultivated crops, and observed Polynesian ritual practices associated with food cultivation. The Māori worldview perceives land and people as one, and the surrounding sea viewed as the source and foundation of all life. Their social and cultural connections are fundamentally linked to the environment.

Early European settlers brought different perceptions of land and agriculture. Christianity, in particular, influenced cultural views of the land. In October 1769 Sydney Parkinson (artist to James Cook) recorded this observation of the coastline near Tolaga Bay: “The country about the bay is agreeable beyond description, and with proper cultivation, might be rendered a second kind of Paradise” (qtd. in Phillips 1). Romanticisation in artistic representations also induced ideological thought about the “moral and physical superiority of rural life” (1). As Victorian Britain became increasingly industrialised, its cities were viewed as corrupt and unclean. The desire to preserve a vision of rural purity took shape in representational media, such as landscape paintings. Comparable
to how contemporary artistic representations romanticise the Aotearoa New Zealand landscape as ‘Middle Earth’, early European visitors saw the potential for the untamed land to be transformed so as to resemble a ‘middle landscape’:

The idealised ‘middle landscape’ – a cultivated rural landscape, which sat between the dirt and decadence of the European city and the fearful barbarism of the bush – became an essential part of New Zealand’s rural mythology” (Phillips 1).

Phillips locates the mythology of a rural way of life, which emerged during the colonial settlement of Aotearoa New Zealand, as a form of compensation for the social realities that accompanied the rapid industrialisation of Europe. For urban citizens, this included a loss of contact with the beauty and innocence of the rural landscape, and the perceived loss of opportunity to own a plot of this idealised rural land. Aotearoa New Zealand was sold to potential settlers, especially the labouring classes, as the chance to turn away from industrialised Europe, and towards a perceived healthier, if not superior, way of life. Settler agencies, such as The New Zealand Company, promoted an ideal rural society where happy families could live and work together. The myth of the great rural way of life thus privileged the dream of land ownership. Furthermore, for the labouring classes, it connected the fantasy of land ownership with the possibility of class mobility.

The contemporary desire to see and know rural life via documentary is thus reflective of the changing landscape in the external social and physical environment. As a case in point, in a 1907 journal entry, Katherine Mansfield noted the following reflection on the natural landscape: "When New Zealand is more artificial, she will give birth to an artist who can treat her natural beauties adequately. This sounds paradoxical but is true” (McNaughton 19). What Mansfield’s quote foreshadows is that only when the nation becomes fully urbanised will its citizens develop a romantic, and therefore mythified, relationship to the landscape and in this way desire to see and know it. I claim that the depictions of rural life within my films stimulate and satisfy a desire to see and know a romanticised rural world, and thus offer a form of compensation
for what appears to have been displaced by urbanisation. Claudia Bell concurs that the “Perpetuation of the myth of the ideal rural way of life to the present occurs for the benefit of those living in it, and for wider society” (148). Therefore, these myths live on in my set of films in order to satisfy the spectators’ nostalgic desire for a rural way of life that now seems displaced in the new millennium.

Four Documentary Films

I have selected a set of four contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand documentaries, namely Kaikohe Demolition (2004), The Last Resort (2006), This Way of Life (2009), and Land of the Long White Cloud (2009). Each film is set in a different rural community. All of the films are connected by the representation of a desire for an authentic, self-sufficient rural way of life, as personified by their subjects. The subjects within Kaikohe Demolition celebrate the community event that defines their sense of rurality. The Last Resort explores the on sale of rural land and water whilst the subjects express a nostalgic desire for the displaced “Kiwi Dream” (Phillips 5). In This Way of Life, the Karenas voice their appreciation for the simplicity of their rural lives. Within Land of the Long White Cloud, many of the subjects discuss their views of globalisation in relation to their rurality.

Following the work of Bell, I will examine each film’s social construction of the rural, which according to Phillips is equivalent to “the real New Zealand” (145). Significantly, the dominant discourse of rurality that binds these films equally reveals notable centre/periphery divisions between rural and city, rural and nation, and rural and global, with globalisation being perceived as the largest threat to maintaining an authentic rural way of life. These divisions connect with Liu’s point about identity and otherness. Often the subjects within these films position themselves as ‘rural selves’ in opposition to an ‘urban’ or ‘Globalised Other’. It is in this regard that all four films resonate within a society struggling to come to terms with a globalised Aotearoa New Zealand at the turn of the millennium and beyond.
Chapter Content

Chapter One conducts a literature review and discussion of relevant theories of rural mythology, identity construction, and documentary representation. Significantly, my initial search of the literature pertaining specifically to my set of films yielded a relative lack of critical engagement beyond film reviews, film magazine pieces and newspaper articles. This presented me with a challenge and opportunity to explore them as a site for contemporary theoretical discussions around Aotearoa New Zealand Identity.

In Chapter Two, I turn my attention to mobilising the rural Arcadia myth through my discussion of the films Kaikohe Demolition and The Last Resort. Subjects within these films exemplify how to live and work in close harmony with nature, and moreover, position their rural communities as “the centre of the universe”. The paradox here is that many of these subjects barely exist on the poverty line and yet express their rural resilience, which ironically can also be interpreted as a form of complicity with their situation. I use the term ‘rural resilience’ in my thesis to describe a particular response to neoliberalism, which is enacted in various ways by the rural subjects within my set of films. Neoliberalism, according to Jessica Johnston et al., is a “term that signifies economic policies of market deregulation and the privatisation of state enterprises; its central theme the inevitability – and the benefits – of corporate-dominated globalisation and perpetual economic growth” (6). Neoliberal economic reforms, implemented by Rogernomics in 1984, accelerated social and economic transformation of Aotearoa New Zealand. These reforms favoured urban development and economic growth at the same time that subsidies were removed from the agricultural sector, which forced its decline. I describe how the subjects within my films provide strong examples of rural resilience, in terms of their creativity and robust self-reliance. However, in so doing, they also express complicity with neoliberal ideologies. The cruel paradox for rural subjects is that they have become ‘resilient’ to a State system that forced them into their ‘rural resilience’,
which they take up as the reassertion of their own identity – their rurality. It is in this manner that they have reinvented themselves as ‘neoliberal rural selves’.

The myth of rural Arcadia operates to resolve this tension. I will analyse key shots and scenes from these films within the socio-historical context of neoliberalism, its implications and ongoing effects. For example, the subjects within these films all celebrate the serene and therapeutic qualities of rural land and water. Excluded from representation are the reforms that led to the rural recession of the 1980s, and the ensuing decades of State neglect of rural regions. The rural Arcadia myth compensates for this socio-historical reality. While Kaikohe Demolition celebrates rural life, The Last Resort explores what happens to a community when rural land is sold to capitalist developers. I will examine the intersection between Māori and Pākehā relations and foreign investment.

In Chapter Three, I will mobilise the taming nature myth through my textual analysis of selected shots and scenes from This Way of Life and Land of the Long White Cloud, within the socio-historical context of globalisation. Many subjects within these films advocate for self-reliance and are exemplary of how modern rural residents have creatively reinvented themselves as neoliberal rural selves. I will also contextualise the contemporary processes of globalisation in contrast with the film subjects’ firm belief in rural autonomy and rural resilience. For example, several of the fishing contestants in Land of the Long White Cloud express their pessimism towards globalisation, especially in the aftermath of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, and promote rural self-reliance. Globalisation, according to Fredric Jameson, is a set of interconnected processes with “five distinct levels”, which he names as technological, political, cultural, economic and social (1). As the fishing contestants discuss perceptions of the negative impacts of global change, such as their views of harmful global technologies, and instable world economies, they advocate for rural self-sufficiency and land ownership as a possible solution, just like the early settlers of 19th century Aotearoa New Zealand. It is in this manner that the mythic structures that I have described have a compensatory and stabilising role for the spectators who are struggling to negotiate the new urbanised and globalised Aotearoa New Zealand.
CHAPTER ONE: Literature Review and Theoretical Perspectives

Power and responsibility reside in knowing; the use we make of what we learn extends beyond our engagement with documentary films to our engagement with the historical world represented by such films. (Nichols 41)

This chapter begins with a literature review sub-divided into three sections: theories of rural mythology, identity construction and documentary representation. Each section will engage a range of theoretical perspectives, which will elaborate the critical concerns of my thesis, as articulated by my set of films: especially the relationship of myth to identity.

This thesis explores the recurrence of certain rural mythologies within a recent cycle of Aotearoa New Zealand documentaries, and their role in the social construction of national and cultural identities. Nichols reminds us of the juncture between documentary, history, and myth. He points out that as documentaries appear to bring lived reality to the screen, they “stimulate epistephilia (a desire to know) in their audiences” (40). Nichols describes this desire as “the underlying premise of documentary: we feel a distinct fascination when we witness the lives of others who seem to belong to the same historical world that we do” (xii). In this regard, documentaries engage spectators in desiring to see and know the historical world through its images and sounds of reality. The representation of Aotearoa New Zealand within European settler societies has always connected to a specific desire for the country as a ‘rural Arcadia’, and moreover, the desire that this representation be real. As such, myths about rural life, that it is “the great way of life” for instance, appear as objective reality onscreen (Bell 146). This produces a problematic link between epistephilia and myth. A desire to see rural life onscreen conflates with a desire to know rural life, and together they tend to reify myth. Specifically, I claim that the subject positions these films generate, through cinematic spectatorship and

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5 I use the term, ‘rural Arcadia’ to describe a place of pastoral paradise that is both real and imagined. The word ‘Arcadia’ is of Greek origin and associates with its national mythology and identity construction.
identification with settler narratives, create a parallel desire to see and know rural life in a romanticised and mythified context. What appears as reality (represented), is actually myth (reproduced). As Nichols points out, “What we know, and how we come to believe in what we know, are matters of social importance” (41).

In my forthcoming analysis chapters, I link the dynamic between epistephilia and myth to the socio-historical contexts that my set of films engages. Most importantly, I claim that the neoliberal reforms initiated in the 1980s induced a rural recession, and produced the contemporary ‘resilient rural subject’ forced into self-reliance. I will draw upon Naomi Klein’s analysis of the neoliberal ‘shock doctrine’ to explicate how these reforms produced an ongoing economic and social ‘disaster’ for rural communities. My discussion of the impacts of globalisation will address how the decline of rural industry is related to the expansion of world markets and economic globalisation. As Jerry Mander claims, “wherever the rules of free trade and economic globalisation are followed, you have economic and ecological disasters immediately thereafter” (qtd. in London 1). I argue that the range of concerns voiced by the subjects within my films cannot be removed from the present-day contexts of globalisation and neoliberal economic policies, as well as the historical issues of rural myths, which are as old as the settlement of Aotearoa New Zealand.

The first section of the literature review will examine theories of myth, which I will use to read rural myths that inform my sample of films. Drawing upon Barthes’ essay “Myth Today” (1957) as a key reference point, I will examine the ways in which popular culture infiltrates everyday life with myth. As Barthes posits, “the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions” but it is human history that converts reality into “mythical language” (110). For instance, Bell describes how within the colonial history of Aotearoa New Zealand, romanticised representations of rural life were marketed to potential European settlers as a way of attracting particular types of immigrants. Romanticised images were used

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6 For more on this, see Klein’s, The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism.
for specific signification, for example, to denote the purity of land in Aotearoa New Zealand qua rural Arcadia. Not only did the representation of the Arcadian myth appeal to skilled labourers, it served the interests of the colonising elite who required these workers. To further this point, I will elaborate on how rural myths operate on an unconscious level to appeal to different classes of people. I will discuss how a complex overlay of class systems and racial inclusion are embedded within rural myths. Furthermore, the films suture certain viewing positions associated with specific class structures into the mythical representations. In the films of my study, rural Aotearoa New Zealand continues to be romanticised as the real Aotearoa New Zealand. Within this context, I argue that urbanisation, neoliberalism, and the perceived threat of change arising from globalisation are effecting a nostalgic turn to cinematic rural representations.

The second section of the literature review considers theories of identity construction from a socio-historical perspective by exploring the complexity of biculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand. Here I will draw upon the work of James Liu, Tim McCreanor, Tracey McIntosh and Teresia Teaiwa to compose a sociological lens for examining the processes of cultural and national identity construction. The ongoing postcolonial traumas these theorists describe, such as unresolved Treaty claims, permeate the narratives of my selected films. Furthermore, Biculturalism is a partnership forged through colonisation, and as such, it remains contested. I will draw upon a key article by Avril Bell, which positions Pākehā as the “empty centre” of biculturalism, to further explore the issues of biculturalism implicated within my documentaries (1). Bell’s metaphor of cultural identification as an absence, points directly to the unresolved historical issues of 19th century European settlement. She posits that Pākehā, or white European migrants, have no real sense of ancestry or knowledge of their ancestors’ reasons for coming to Aotearoa New Zealand. Moreover, Bell claims that Pākehā New Zealanders “don’t remember how their coming and being here was at the cost of the tangata whenua” (3). In both respects, a desire not to know presents itself as an inverse form of epistephilia. Settler societies are often characterised by such expressions of emptiness. As people assimilate in a new environment, the trauma of the past can convert to a silenced or empty
narrative. I want to suggest that in many of these films a disavowal of the past blocks the ability for Pakeha to become in the present, and correlatively, impedes the development of a cohesive bicultural nation. Myths of Pākehā national identity and belonging serve to mask such cultural confusion. To augment this part of my discussion, I will also draw upon the work of Turner, who describes the condition of “contemporary unsettlement” as the desire to forget the traumatic processes of settlement and dislocation (21). I will extend Turner’s points to argue that living with the condition of ‘unsettled biculturalism’, and a sense of displacement with land, drives the mythified expressions of cultural and national identity, as is represented by my set of documentary films.

In the third section of the literature review, I will reflect on Nichols’ discussion of performative, participatory and observational modes of documentary, analysing how they operate within my set of films to express a mythic perspective on rural life in Aotearoa New Zealand. Together, these documentary modalities work to conceal tensions between romanticised depictions of rural myths and the historical experience of rural life. Again, these modes thus allow for what Grierson describes as “a creative treatment of actuality” (qtd. in Nichols 6), in this case the filmmakers’ selected and ordered subjective representation of rural life. Here, I want to connect Grierson’s definition of documentary as a form of creative realisation with Barthes’ conception of myth as a language that transforms social actuality. Based on this connection, I claim that documentary will always tend towards mythification. I also want to propose that ‘selected and ordered subjective representation’ is itself always an expression of a desire. To extend this argument, I will draw upon Cowie’s theorisation of documentary as simultaneously “the spectacle of actuality and the desire for reality” (1). All of the documentaries in my set are characterised by such a “spectacle of actuality” insofar as they emphatically assert and attempt to capture (through the visual language of cinema) human desire as connection to specific rural locations (1). This argument links to my earlier point that seeing is always tied to a desire for knowledge. With regards to seeing and knowing rural life, this is always a selective desire, which in this case reverberates the traumas of 19th century settlement. It is precisely within this space of selective desire that myth making
takes place. Hence, the selected and ordered words and images of these films both “speak” and “speak about” a desire for rural life within the present era of urbanisation and globalisation (1). Documentary representation fulfills this desire. In desiring to know reality through documentary, spectators desire to see a fantasy, which I have termed ‘the great rural way of life’.

**Theorising Rural Mythology**

My engagement with the literature raises a set of critical problems. First, there is the problem of defining myth. Following on from this, I explore the problem of how myths operate in society. I will also examine which elements of the theories of myth are applicable to cinematic representations of myths regarding rural life in Aotearoa New Zealand. I will address rural mythologies as a subset of the study of myth.

**Mythologies**

Barthes’ *Mythologies* illustrates his abiding interest in the signification of everyday life within media and popular culture. His methodology is two-fold: an ideological critique of representations, alongside a semiotic analysis of the mechanics of mythical language. For Barthes, myth is the mechanism by which a dominant culture naturalises its relationship to reality. In aiming to go beyond just unmasking certain persistent myths that structure everyday life, he also aspired to critique their ideological implications. As Edward W. Said acutely observes in his critical review of *Mythologies*, Barthes “wrenches a definition out of a common but constructed object, making the object speak its hidden, but ever-so-present, reservoir of manufactured sense” (5). In applying this understanding of myth to my thesis, I will aim to discern how myths fix certain connotations to rural representations, which are mis-taken as equivalent to a denotative level of meaning. For example, the ’clean and green’ myth that is so often attached to photographic landscape images of Aotearoa New Zealand exemplifies how mythical representations appear as natural and uncontestable observations of reality.
What is a Myth Today?

Although Barthes defines myth as “a type of speech”, he extends it broadly to visual language (109). In so doing, Barthes extends Levi-Strauss’ perception of myth as a ‘structural language’ (Strenski 129-159) to assert that any and “[e]very object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society” (109). By this analogy, texts, images, objects, and other modes of cultural representation all convey meaning. Moving-images (via myth and semiotic analysis) can also be considered “a type of speech” (109). As I have already identified, Barthes’ formula for mythical language contains two complementary constituents: semiology and ideological analysis. Semiology is the science of signs and their meanings. Ideological analysis is a mode of historical critique that examines the naturalisation of certain ideas, beliefs and values. As Barthes attests, “it is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and death of mythical language” (110). In this respect, myths transform as they speak about a reality that has come into prevalence at a particular historical moment. During colonial settlement, for example, artistic representations of Aotearoa New Zealand implied that this land was unoccupied, or that it belonged to no one: terra nullius. This rural myth masked the social reality that much of the land on offer to settlers had in fact been confiscated or stolen. Such mythical representations served a particular purpose and circulated a set of socially constructed ideals about rural life. Labouring immigrants came to believe in the possibility of land ownership, as well as class elevation. In order to align Barthes’ understanding of myth with a critique of ideology, Terry Eagleton offers this insight:

A dominant power may legitimise itself by promoting beliefs and values congenial to it; naturalising and universalising such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and apparently inevitable; denigrating ideas which might challenge it; excluding rival forms of thought, perhaps by some unspoken but systematic logic; and obscuring social reality in ways convenient

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7 For further information on Levi-Strauss’ concept of myth, see Four Theories of Myth, Chapter 6.
8 Used in international law, Terra nullius is a Latin expression meaning “land belonging to no one”.

to itself. Such 'mystification', as it is commonly known, frequently takes the form of masking or suppressing social conflicts, from which arises the conception of ideology as an imaginary resolution of real contradictions. (5-6).

The key ideas from Eagleton's definition, which share an affinity with Barthes, are those of naturalisation, masking and the resultant imaginary reality. When combined, theories of myth and ideology critique the socially constructed nature of reality, which otherwise appears as natural. A deceptive reality serves to mask the real power structures of society and the interests of the dominant cultural group. This is an important concept in relation to my set of documentaries, as all of the films rework and reproduce contemporary rural myths. For example, as I will show in my close analysis of *Kaikohe Demolition*, the representation of the subjects' 'rural resilience' (I use this term to denote the subjects' self-reliance and complicity with neoliberalism) masks the political history of state neglect and economic exclusion. In a similar naturalising manner, the depiction of what I describe as 'reactionary solidarity' (between Māori and Pākehā) over the land sales to a Globalising Other depicted in *The Last Resort* masks the history of unsettled biculturalism and a sense of displacement with land and identity.

Insofar as documentary pretends to be an expression of real life, it can lead film spectators to accept their myths as natural, and then construct a view of themselves in relation to the myth. A key rural myth perpetuated by my set of films is the dream of leaving the city behind to go and live off the land. This colonial settler dream (or myth) of the great rural way of life is now reproduced as a modern nationalised dream, what Phillips refers to as the "Kiwi Dream" (5). For Phillips, the “Kiwi Dream” describes “the sun, the space, the physical beauty and the sense of a relaxed escape into nature” (5). I want to suggest that the “Kiwi Dream” encompasses not only an escape to the beach or countryside; it also extends to the desire for the actual ownership of a piece of coastal or pastoral paradise (5). Yet in reality, it is not possible for everyone to own land, let alone live sustainably from it. Nevertheless, the myth is alive and pervasive

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9 See Phillips. 'Beach culture - The Kiwi dream', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand.
while fashionable lifestyle blocks or the weekend bach or crib are accessible only to a select few.

Representations of rural life in my film set all constitute powerful examples of myth. Some of the key components include depictions of ‘rural Arcadia’, ‘taming nature’ and ‘land ownership’. These components are often interrelated within specific films. For example, land ownership is frequently constituted as a naturalised desire, which reflects the longstanding “Kiwi Dream” (5). Here we see that myth has a double function: myth “makes us understand something and it imposes it on us” (Barthes 117). This “Kiwi Dream” myth does not function only, or even primarily, for rural people but for the largely urban populace of Aotearoa New Zealand, who also constitute the largest audience for these films (Phillips 5).

At this juncture, it will be useful to explore the semiotic component of Barthes’ myth analysis. Barthes asserts that any semiological system consists of three terms: the signifier, the signified and the sign, of which the latter is “the associative total of the first two terms” (113). What is important to grasp is the “correlation” that unites all three terms (113). Consider the lithograph below [see fig. 1], published in Edward Jerningham Wakefield’s book, *Adventure in New Zealand* (1845). It was used to promote the New Zealand Company settlement at New Plymouth, primarily to farm labourers from rural England and Scotland. Phillips provides these notes on the accompanying text:

... it was the view from ‘the garden of the Company’s agent ... and the colonists are essentially agricultural.’ The cows on the beach, the sheep on the distant hills, the horses in the street, and the people tilling their crops emphasise the agricultural element of the town” (Phillips 2).
Semiotically, this lithograph signifies rural life, but weighted with “a definite signified”, for example, settler desire, it becomes a sign (113). Essentially, what turns semiotic language into mythical language is a lateral shift or slip in the semiotic sequence. This means that with mythical language, connotation appears as denotation. Within this lithograph, for example, we see a mythically constructed view of rural life. It thereby expresses more than just a representation of rural life in Aotearoa New Zealand. What we see here is a strategic plan for the construction of a rural Aotearoa New Zealand. When constructed reality is experienced as unconstructed this demonstrates the creation of a second-order semiological system: what Barthes calls a “metalanguage” (115). The signifier slips to become a new and preconstituted signified, such as what Phillips describes as “a land of Arcadian abundance” (2). Myth thereby gets hold of existing language and “builds its own system; and the myth itself” (115). As we see in the lithograph, this system involves everything from familiar dwellings, forms of village space and infrastructures, as well as the addition of farm animals, and all from a vantage point (that of the Company agent’s home), which connotes both visual and political mastery. All the symbolic systems of myth are embedded in the image. It represents a view of rural
Aotearoa New Zealand, as if representational of what is on offer to all settlers. Hence, this representation has a particular social usage added to it, adapted and embellished for the immigrant’s consumption. As we shall see in my film analyses, many of the issues that I have discussed here in regard to rural myths resurface in my examination of the documentary representation of rural life.

To develop Barthes’ concept of mythical language, I will describe a recurring pattern of rural representation from my film set. The opening shot of Kaikohe Demolition presents a rural landscape. At the level of semiotic language, the establishing shot is a signifier (an image), which denotes a location (rural countryside). However, at the second-order mythological level, it signifies something else: the advancement of the “Kiwi Dream” (Phillips 5). The image also invokes a nostalgic desire for an unspoilt landscape and plays into romanticised perceptions of rural life, which have their origins in Victorian ideals of a rural utopia. The important point is that myth is motivated by cultural desires that are often unconscious. As I have established, myth pretends to be equivalent to what is represented when it is actually smuggling in other meanings. As a result, connotation masquerades as denotation. Connotative meanings are thus conveyed covertly, naturalised, and reproduced within a particular historical world to serve specific ideological intentions. By taking rural representations as an object of study, a Barthesian analysis must consider what is being excluded in order to constitute the myth, and also, how the signifier is being slipped to conceal the exclusion. For example, this idealised rural myth or “Kiwi Dream” distorts the reality for the majority of citizens who live and work in urban areas but still identify their national identity with rurality (5). Moreover, this type of rural representation reproduces the insidious myth that the land belongs to all citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand, masking that it was seized in early settlement. Myths of identity and belonging operate to obscure this cultural and socio-historical issue.

Myths have historical significances as well as political implications. According to Barthes, myth “robs language” of the historical and political issues that impact on contemporary circumstances (135). In The Last Resort, the myth of unrestricted
access to the foreshore and seabed is explored as Māori and Pākehā protest against rural land sales. Each group stakes a competing cultural claim to the land and sea yet it is a harmonious bicultural fantasy or myth that is reproduced onscreen. Moreover, this film creates a viewing position for its spectators in which myth appears as reality. A Barthesian critique enables the elucidation of this bicultural myth by revealing the suppressed historical and political ancestry of the subjects within the film. As Avril Bell argues, Pākehā dominance allows for the social and cultural forgetting that European migration “took the form of colonising settlement” (9). Myths not only deprive language, they also selectively silence narratives. To this end, I claim that the current foreshore and seabed debate cannot be separated from unresolved Treaty claims.

All of my documentary films “serve as a support to mythical speech” (Barthes 110). In order for me to select and analyse some of the key rural myths that are specific to Aotearoa New Zealand, it will be necessary to address their particular historical context. I will compare colonial and contemporary rural myths in context, and the parallels will reveal the active function of recurring rural mythologies. Ivan Strenski corroborates this point with his assertion that an analysis of myth functions to understand “text, in context, informed by intention” (9). Myths that circulate and reappear through historical and contemporary narratives are always conditioned by the dominant ideology. Without doubt, all of my films engage with notions of nostalgia and a desire for the great rural way of life. Colonial settlers sought a rural life that eluded them in Industrial Britain. Now the largely urban population of Aotearoa New Zealand consumes a mythic version of rural Aotearoa New Zealand on screen. In Land of the Long White Cloud, images of transplendent land and seascapes are selected, ordered, and edited, and are thereby, in Barthes’ words, “decorated, adapted to a certain type of consumption” (109). Mythified picturesque images enable nostalgic desires for nature, and position spectators as consumers of rural representations. Here myth operates to transform rural Aotearoa New Zealand into something to be commodified, desired, and consumed via documentary representation.
Rural Mythologies in Aotearoa New Zealand

The following discussion focuses on the representation of rural mythologies specific to Aotearoa New Zealand. I have selected a set of key colonial mythologies that established a romantic rural ideal. I will elaborate each myth in turn to provide a structure for my discussion. From the master myth, which I term ‘the great rural way of life’, I articulate two distinct yet interrelated sub-myths: the ‘rural Arcadia’ myth and the ‘taming nature’ myth. Each sub-myth has its own distinct significations that also work together to idealise rural Aotearoa New Zealand as the real Aotearoa New Zealand. I also organise the discussion of my films around their expressions of these interrelated rural myths within both my analysis chapters. In Chapter Two, the rural Arcadia myth predominates in my analysis of Kaikohe Demolition and The Last Resort. For Chapter Three, my discussion of the taming nature myth directs my analysis of This Way of Life and Land of the Long White Cloud, respectively.

As I have affirmed, the great rural way of life myth was actively used to sell Aotearoa New Zealand to potential migrants during its 19th century settlement. Sustained use of settler propaganda marketed Aotearoa New Zealand as an opportunity to experience an authentic rural lifestyle far away from industrial Britain. Furthermore, land ownership in Victorian Britain was a privilege reserved for the bourgeoisie. In Aotearoa New Zealand, land ownership offered the possibility of class mobility. Claudia Bell, to whose work I am indebted, argues that assurances of “a better way of life in New Zealand” and “a chance to own one’s own land” were common myths that were attached to romanticised representations of rural life (145). In my analysis to follow, I argue that this colonial view of rural Aotearoa New Zealand is reproduced in my set of films.

Second, I discuss the notion of Aotearoa New Zealand as rural Arcadia. During 19th century settlement, artistic representations of rural Arcadia connoted “a garden paradise” and a place where “whole families lived and worked together” in harmony with their environment (147). I use the term ‘rural Arcadia’ to describe the myth of what Bell identifies as the longing for “an idyllic way of life within nature” (146). In Chapter Two, I examine the reproduction of the rural
Arcadia myth within the films *Kaikohe Demolition* and *The Last Resort*. I argue that these documentaries produce a certain desire for the therapeutic qualities of rural land and water within this ‘Arcadia’. As the subjects in these films celebrate the ease of rural living, I discuss their suppression of an unease that bubbles below the surface of representation.

Third, I examine the taming nature myth as an alternate sub-myth of the great rural way of life. In contrast to the more moderate representation of early Aotearoa New Zealand as Arcadia, depictions of this myth connote what Bell describes as a “frontier-style slash and burn way of taming nature, requiring heroic physical prowess” (147). This type of representation appealed to the more adventurous of the colonial migrants – those who sought independence through working one’s own land into productivity. Bell suggests that settler agents promoted Aotearoa New Zealand as the place to “tame the wilderness into productive land” so as to serve their own nation-building interests (147). In Chapter Three, I argue that the taming nature myth is reproduced in the films *This Way of Life* and *Land of the Long White Cloud*. I also analyse the conditions in which the subjects of these films take up certain rural myths in response to the processes of globalisation.

I will explore myths of identity and belonging throughout both Chapters Two and Three. Bell suggests that the founding myths of Aotearoa New Zealand were “perpetuated by, and for, early European settlers” (145). However, myths about the great rural way of life, such as the chance for a better life through land acquisition, told only one part of the tale. Bell argues that colonial settler myths “inevitably romanticise the struggle for success” while also concealing the narratives of “racism, land disputes and social class issues” (147). As such, the narrative of the conquest of land masks the narrative of the conquest of people. I argue that the rural myths within all the films of this study mask the trauma of 19th century colonisation, as well as unresolved Treaty claims. Moreover, these unsettled issues impact upon documentary representations of biculturalism, which in itself acts as a block to the development of a cohesive bicultural nation.
The Great Rural Way of Life

In order to understand the founding myths of Aotearoa New Zealand, we need to explore the context of migration from Britain. The English statistician William Farr distinguished ‘healthy districts’ in Britain, which were usually rural counties, from ‘unhealthy districts’, most often overcrowded polluted cities. Phillips notes that throughout the 1830s and 1840s, “many people in England believed in the theory that population growth was related to food production, and that as Britain’s population continued to rise there would be penury and starvation” (3). In the historical context of commodifying rural Aotearoa New Zealand, the fantasy on offer was the chance to flee Britain for the perceived ‘healthy district’ of Mother England.

Figure 2. Punch: Here and There; or Emigration a Remedy. 1848.

Media representations, such as the emigration poster above [see fig. 2], supported moving to Aotearoa New Zealand where abundant land would bring plenty of food and prosperity. Thus, an equation was forged between land, opportunity, and self-sufficiency. This might explain why citizens still cling to representations of accessible land as a guarantee of fulfilling the “Kiwi Dream” (Phillips 5). As my analysis of Land of the Long White Cloud indicates, the subjects within this film desire to know that rural self-sufficiency is sustainable, preferring local autonomy to global economies. In this regard, rural myths
compensate for the spread of global capitalism and its direct influence on Aotearoa New Zealand’s rural decline.

To an extent the ‘healthy district’ analogy was an accurate account of Aotearoa New Zealand, as immigrants could access a greater amount of food per-capita. However, the terms of living in a ‘healthy district’ were negotiated under capitalist domination, in which only certain social classes qualified for entry. This type of selection criterion contributed to the construction of a rural-centric national identity. Investors established independent recruitment agencies to attract desirable settlers. The New Zealand Land Company, for instance, offered free passages to certain types of people with specific sets of skills. As the following advertisement indicates [see fig. 3], this company was interested in young, married agricultural labourers, mechanics, and gardeners to help construct a rural nation. Here, the signification connotes the opportunity to attain the great rural way of life by way of familial hard work, yet it also masks the narrative of cultural and social conflict within the processes of colonisation.

Figure 3. The New Zealand Land Company Newspaper Advertisement. 1839.
The New Zealand Land Company supported ‘Systematic Colonisation’, an economic concept developed by British Politician Edward Gibbon Wakefield. He believed that the colonies and the Mother Country suffered from an imbalance in land, labour and capital. Britain was overcrowded with labour and capital and as such suffered from low wages, unemployment, and harsh living conditions. Conversely, Aotearoa New Zealand’s development and prosperity were hindered by the easy acquisition of ‘free’ or very cheap grants of land. Scarcity of labour drove away capital, as investors disliked the idea of having to work their own land. Wakefield’s solution was to sell the land at a ‘sufficient price’ to “ensure that only some would be able to afford to buy land, and landowners would have labourers to work for them” (Phillips 5). The implication was, “if you just work hard enough, you, too, can own your own land, and be your own boss.” This type of ideology is taken up again and transformed within neoliberalism. For example, in This Way of Life, Peter personifies the neoliberal work ethic when he enters into rural self-employment. He reinvents himself as a self-reliant entrepreneur. On the one hand, this exemplifies his creativity with sourcing employment. On the other hand, it demonstrates his own complicity with an unstable global economy that forced him to become self-reliant.

For the 19th century labouring migrants the myth of the great rural way of life was essentially a form of entrapment, although it offered the illusion of freedom of choice. In some cases, land was advertised before it had even been purchased from Māori. At times, land orders were only ever partially fulfilled, which left labourers out of work and with little choice other than to become land squatters. Other suppressed narratives include that of land annexation from local Iwi, which would lead to the New Zealand wars. Contemporary effects of this suppression manifest in ongoing Waitangi Tribunal claims, and in current foreshore and seabed debates as featured in The Last Resort. Both Māori and Pākehā subjects within this film interpret the on sale of rural land and water to foreign investors as a form of “21st century land confiscation”. I claim that this view of shared land ownership, displaces unresolved conflicts within

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10 The New Zealand Company promised their investors “100 acres (40.5 hectares) of farmland and one town acre; the initial 1,000 [land] orders were snapped up in a month” (Phillips, 3).
biculturalism, and redirects them in the form of hostility towards the Globalising Other: personified here as foreign property investors.

**Rural Arcadia**

Healthy Aotearoa New Zealand was promoted as another Eden or a ‘closer to God’ experience of life. In contrast to the depiction of corrupt and contaminated cities, imagery of a pastoral paradise appealed to migrants who desired a more wholesome orientation. In the Industrial era “Romantic ideas about the moral and physical superiority of rural life emerged” (Phillips 1) and became popularised in media representations. The landscape paintings of John Constable, for example, demonstrated a desire to preserve “rural innocence and beauty” (1). The following watercolour by Richard Pheney is exemplary of how the Romantic artistic tradition was transferred onto representations of Aotearoa New Zealand [see Fig. 4]. Phillips observes, “the golden tone and the cattle and sheep in the foreground are strongly reminiscent of the English Romantic school of painting” (1). Thus, the Romantic tradition transposed Aotearoa New Zealand’s landscape within Arcadian mythologies.

![Figure 4. Pheney, Richard Cliff Francis. Taranaki farming scene with Mt Egmont in the background, seen from Omata. 1867.](image)

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11 This depiction of ‘rural Arcadia’ also has a racial dimension: the ‘mongrel race’ inhabited unwholesome infectious cities whereas the ideal new citizen sought refuge in the purity of rural places.
The documentary pretext of objective actuality compounds the desire to preserve a rural Arcadia through the cinematic viewing experience. Wide-shots of romanticised landscapes are frequently inserted into the aesthetic narration of *Kaikohe Demolition* and *The Last Resort*. These panoramic shots capture its totality (via wide framing) by the same stroke that they establish its purity. Such representations are also accompanied by images of the rituals of purification within the diegesis of my set of films. For example, the following image from *Kaikohe Demolition* reveals the demolition drivers’ regular cleansing ritual [see fig. 5]. The thermal springs function as a therapeutic site of nonviolence for the men. In the next chapter, I will discuss how selected shots of men bathing in water connote ‘purification’ on a number of levels.

![Figure 5. Purity of Naked Bodies Connecting in Water. Kaikohe Demolition (2004)](image)

The myth of rural Arcadia as a place where happy rural families work and live in communal harmony was used in settler propaganda to “stimulate immigration and capital investment, thus enhancing development” (Bell 146). Absent from the frame was any suggestion of social conflict or cultural dissonance. Similar to this depiction, *The Last Resort* promotes the communal campsite as a place where families can experience traditional living in presumed bicultural harmony. At stake with this film is the opportunity to address bicultural disharmony in the form of unsettled claims to land, foreshore and seabed. But, rather than address cultural difference, the filmmakers focus their attention towards drawing
parallels between Māori and Pākehā views of the land. The antagonism that these issues generate is displaced onto a Globalising Other: an imagined new wave of investors and settlers. In my analysis, I argue that the filmmakers’ emphasis on commonalities between Māori and Pākehā produces a false synthesis for spectators: a documentary pastiche of divergent cultural positions.

Taming Nature

The taming nature myth was transmitted in Victorian media representations, such as in the set of lithographs published in Edward Jerningham Wakefield’s book *Adventure in New Zealand* (1845). Phillips suggests that these lithographs were designed for the immigrants who “looked to New Zealand to fulfill dreams of independence through land ownership” (4).

![Figure 6. Saxton John Waring. The town and part of the harbour of Nelson. 1842.](image)

Widespread belief in the transformative power of labour, the idea in which hard honest toil generates people of good moral character, was also evident in depictions of rural Aotearoa New Zealand. In the lithograph above [see fig. 6], heroic feats of taming the wild into a “bountiful Eden” connoted a better way of life in the early settlement of Nelson (Bell 147). The films *This Way of Life* and *Land of the Long White Cloud* also reproduce this myth by nourishing spectator
nostalgia for aspects of rural life that may elude them in their everyday urban existence. The following image of Peter Karena working his horses in the face of wild weather denotes one facet of rural life while connoting self-sufficiency and resilience [see fig. 7]. Peter believes that his physicality and moral integrity connect with his rural environment. My analysis reveals that his dream of self-sufficiency collides with the realities that accompany land ownership. Similarly, in Land of the Long White Cloud, long shots of contestants taming the sea into a bountiful submission have been edited alongside their piece to camera views on rural autonomy, together creating a mythological link between control over the environment and independence [see fig. 8]. Many locals offer self-sufficiency as a solution to the perceived dominance of global economies. On the one hand, their rural resilience reveals an endearing naïveté. On the other hand, their response to globalisation reveals their complicity within an untenable economic model that forces them to be self-reliant rural residents.
I have discussed the ‘building blocks’ of the rural myths that are specific to Aotearoa New Zealand as a way to understand how present relationships to rural land and water are, and have been, shaped by history. I suggest that the rural myths used in the early promotion of Aotearoa New Zealand established a romantic view of rural life that has been reconstituted in the present through documentary representation. Settler and contemporary rural myths collide to express a particular dynamic of desire. Early settlers desired an authentic rural way of life away from urbanisation and industrialisation and toward the settler dream of land ownership. Similarly, modern citizens desire to return to a pre-urbanised, pre-neoliberal real Aotearoa New Zealand in order to assume the “Kiwi Dream” of land ownership (Phillips 5).

**Myths of Identity and Belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand**

As Bell affirms, the “perpetuation of the myth of the ideal rural way of life to the present occurs for the benefit of those living it, and for wider society” (148). Rural mythologies function for the benefit of rural residents as it allows them to believe that they are living the “Kiwi Dream” (Phillips 5). However, it is a curious dream given that the majority of ‘Kiwi’ citizens live in urban areas, and have done so from as early as 1911. Yet representation of rural life, as if generally characteristic of everyday life in Aotearoa New Zealand, continues to lure city folk, tourists, and a new wave of contemporary settlers. The emergence of rural “homestays and farm walks” as well as city-fringe “lifestyle farms” demonstrates how the rural ideal is exploited for the benefit of the local and national economy (7). In this neoliberal context, in which free-market capitalism is favoured, it is no wonder that rural ideals are kept alive.

The urbanisation of Aotearoa New Zealand has provoked a nostalgic desire for something that only ever existed as an imaginative fantasy (or has been widely unavailable). In this regard, rural myths appeal primarily to urban spectators who get to vicariously experience the “Kiwi Dream” from a nostalgic viewing position (5). Over and above their weekend breaks to the countryside, these

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12 Phillips reports that statistical records collected for the 1911 New Zealand Census confirmed for the first time that more people lived in urban areas than in rural places, such as farms and villages.
spectators indulge in ‘cinematic breaks’ to the romantic rural on screen. In *This Way of Life*, images of Peter Karena working the land denote more than just a ‘hunter’ or ‘horse wrangler’. Peter is the embodiment of the Aotearoa New Zealand male pioneer, or the real New Zealander. Myth works on these images to smuggle in connotative meanings, such as ‘authenticity’, ‘freedom’ and ‘self-sufficiency’. At the same time, this myth silences the narratives of neoliberal reforms and the rural downturn from the 1980s, which forced rural people to assume their resilience and self-reliance. Spectators are spared such historical-political realities as they take up the myths of Peter’s idyllic rural life.

*Kaikohe Demolition* exemplifies what neoliberalism has done to rural Aotearoa New Zealand. The rural downturn of the 1980s shifted the flow of capital from rural to urban areas. As Nairn et al. argue, this accelerated localised “inequality and social exclusion” that continues into the present (11). *Kaikohe Demolition* illustrates the difference between living the rural dream and existing on the poverty line; whereas, in *Land of the Long White Cloud*, the Auckland-based fishing contestants believe they have found another alternative: an opportunity to return to real nature. As the desire for nature is amplified the representation of rural life becomes something more than it is in reality: the “hyper-rural” (Bell 157). Depictions of the “hyper-rural”, for example, Arcadian visions of paradise, are mythologised and reproduced as the real Aotearoa New Zealand (157). Here, connotation comes to overpower and substitute for denotation. Many of the subjects within my films express this perception of their rural way of life. For example, the land that Peter refers to as his birthright is a myth. The hyper-rural depicted is the historical fantasy of claims to land via settlement.

Rural subjects in my group of films perceive globalisation as an agent of unwanted social change. In *Land of the Long White Cloud*, several subjects express a desire for the outside world to “stay out”. They believe that the controlling and homogenising effects of globalisation will alter their sense of identity – both rural and national. Their views are relayed through piece to camera interviews, inserted between shots of mythical rural imagery, which oversimplifies the multiplicity of modern Aotearoa New Zealand’s cultural and
national identities. For example, the direct address from Māori and Pākehā fishing contestants offers the impression of a unified nation standing together on the issue of globalisation. The production of a global, non-Aotearoa New Zealand enemy thereby provides a unifying ‘Other’ for the production of an imagined bi-cultural unity. This exemplifies Barthes’ assertion that myth “robs language” of certain historical and political contexts (135). Accordingly, the perceived contemporary crisis has a historical basis that is overlooked in the promotion of a cohesive bicultural nation.

Mythologised accounts of rural life remain central to the construction of identities. Rural mythologies tend to reproduce the dominant culture’s social values and ideologies, which in turn impacts on how citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand view themselves, and society as a whole. For example, desiring the rural becomes linked to class aspirations and neoliberal values, such as entrepreneurialism. Koenraad Kuiper corroborates this point when he claims that identity construction in Aotearoa New Zealand continues to be informed by the historical origins and the modern impact of “rural rituals and practices” (173). The relation between representations of rural mythology and the construction of Aotearoa New Zealand cultural and national identities will inform the next section of my discussion.

**Theorising Identity Construction**

In this section, I draw upon a selection of key socio-historical perspectives to examine the link between rural myth and identity, within the context of my film set. Aotearoa New Zealand has been described as a nation with a deep-seated identity crisis, constantly searching for a defining sense of self. Liu et al. suggest that identity construction in Aotearoa New Zealand is a “dynamic” process that evolves in response to both external and internal factors (11). In my discussion, I focus on two of these factors – biculturalism (internal) and globalisation (external). As Liu et al. point out, in the early millennium (the period in which my set of films were produced) popular and political debates focused on “Treaty settlements, immigration, and ownership of the seabed and foreshore” (11). I
propose that these issues ‘speak to’ Aotearoa New Zealand’s bicultural status, within the context of a nation of “dynamic and multi-layered” identities (14). They also ‘speak about’ the factors that contribute to a national identity in crisis. These issues arise in my films, and suggest that at the heart of these matters is a relation between people and place.

Biculturalism, as a mode of national identification, maintains a contested status, especially in relation to issues of land ownership, legal rights and obligations. In contrast to the position of Liu et al., Bell, along with Turner, suggests that identity is not evolving but is impaled upon the dilemma of early settlement and colonialism, which seems doomed to repeat itself in displaced forms. The only thing that varies is the terms of this displacement. I explore concepts of biculturalism and displacement within the theoretical discussion that follows, as well as several key historical factors that block bicultural cohesion, which produce a sense of “contemporary unsettlement” for citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand (Turner 20).13

Globalisation interrelates with the challenges of biculturalism for the subjects in my films, many of whom view it as a key threat to maintaining their rural identities. In particular, it is the “fast moving processes of globalization” in contrast to the slow pace of an idealised rural life that adds a greater sense of urgency to the project of articulating an autonomous national identity (Turner 1). Although, as Turner aptly points outs, “globalization is a curious ‘threat’ given that the nation was founded on the back of the globalizing British Empire” (1). That is, Aotearoa New Zealand is, and always has been, a settler nation. Diverse cultural groups have arrived in successive waves of migration, travelling across large bodies of water, desiring to reconstruct their identities in a new location. The processes of 19th century European settlement in particular invoked certain bourgeoisie rural ideals that were transferred onto the new way of life. Early settlement sustained a belief in “the great [rural] way of life” (Bell 146), which over time has evolved into the “Kiwi Dream” (Phillips 5). In this regard, the myth

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13 I borrow the term “contemporary unsettlement” from Stephen Turner. He uses this term to describe the psychological condition that enables a “forgetting” of the traumatic processes of settlement and dislocation.
of the great rural way of life associates with early settlement, while the “Kiwi Dream” myth allies with the desire to reclaim the rural in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand (5).

Themes of identity construction that thread through rural ideology are reflected in the social discourses that inform my set of documentary narratives. In a noteworthy piece to camera recorded in *Land of the Long White Cloud*, Rama, a local Māori fishing contestant, voices his anger over the offshore control of local prices. From his perspective, which is shared among many local residents, the response to global capitalism is to take up the taming nature myth, which is promoted as a possibility for all Aotearoa New Zealand citizens. Heather, another local Māori resident, claims, ”You’ve got fish if you’re hungry. You’ve got hunters that get pigs. There’s always a way of getting food up here.” Turner’s earlier observation alludes to a certain irony with invoking rural autonomy, given that the settlement and existence of Aotearoa New Zealand was always prefaced on its international trading relations with Britain. Nonetheless, rural myths that invoke notions of self-sufficiency compensate for a perceived loss of control over one’s local economy. In this manner, the film subjects’ desire localisation, or indeed, ruralisation, to overturn their views of globalisation.

I propose that rural myths have informed Aotearoa New Zealand’s development and division as a nation. If Aotearoa New Zealand is a nation built upon the founding trauma of settlement, in which fundamental relationships to people and place were formed, the ongoing issues with biculturalism, neoliberalism and globalisation underpin its present trauma. These factors have reignited a nostalgic desire for its founding attachments, within the context of renegotiating what it means to be a citizen in Aotearoa New Zealand with a sense of belonging.

**Identity, Self and the Other**

Trinh T. Minh-ha defines identity as “a notion that relies on the concept of an essential, authentic core that remains hidden to one’s consciousness and that requires the elimination of all that is considered foreign or not true to the self, that is to say, not-I, other” (1). Accordingly, there is a relation between identity
formation (as defined by Trinh) and the conception of myth with which I have been working. In Barthes’ view, myths privilege the dominant cultural group’s view of the Other. As is often the case in my set of films, the Other is constructed from a Western perspective, or in this case, the point of view of the ‘Pākehā Self’ in relation to the ‘Māori Other’. Consider how identities are implicated in the following interaction between Uncle Bimm and the director of *Kaikohe Demolition*:

Kia ora! Kia ora! Welcome everybody to Kaikohe, Northland Demolition Derby. They call me Uncle Bimm... Why? Because I’m about the oldest in this group. I’m about 48 and the rest of the boys, they’re only about 16, Bro. And here on my right... just coming into focus... here is my, um, boss and manager, John Zielinski of NIFI. This is my boss... and he’d like to say a few words to New Zealand.

Uncle Bimm begins his introduction by referencing his rural locality, and extends a warm welcome to everyone who is elsewhere. This division also maps onto the relationship between the world represented in the film and that of the spectator. The direct address to spectators invites a mediated form of participation within the narration. Uncle Bimm also makes reference to his personal identity (name, age, rural background) and his social identities (relationship with his boss, membership with a group of derby drivers). In this regard, his sense of identity and belonging is informed by his relationships to rural people and place. However, there is also a sense of ‘difference’ in operation. Uncle Bimm is included in the group of demolition drivers, but he is different to John and the “boys” in several ways. First, as the elder of a group of “boys”, Uncle Bimm has the task of introducing his boss and manager John Zielinski. This sets up a coded hierarchal division between employee and employer (Other). Second, the mise-en-scène of the ‘introduction scene’ signifies an implicit inequality. On a denotative level, this image signifies two derby men who share a love for the sport. It is the manner in which Uncle Bimm introduces John into the frame that signifies an imbalance. On a connotative level, it is the way that John occupies the
frame (stance, attitude) that signifies his position of dominance [see fig. 9]. Third, consider the way Uncle Bimm hesitates to describe his relationship to John. He recognises John not as one of the “boys” but as “not-I, other” (Trinh 1). John is a member of the dominant cultural group, coexisting within a complex bicultural nation. In this representation, the dominance is coded, masked, and naturalised through the reproduced myth of harmonious biculturalism. As my textual analysis of *Kaikohe Demolition* and *The Last Resort* will highlight, points of difference correlate with points of contention.

![Figure 9. Uncle Bimm and John Zielinski. Kaikohe Demolition (2004).](image)

**Pākehā Dominance in a Bicultural Nation**

Pākehā exist in Aotearoa New Zealand as a direct result of colonialism. All that the colonisers systematically arranged, such as legal systems and political organisation, allow Pākehā to occupy a position of dominance in relation to Māori. Nationalism, according to Bell, involves two claims, “a claim to be the people of a particular place, and on the basis of that claim, a claim to sovereignty, to the right to be self-governing” [4]. A claim to be ‘the people’ usually has apparent historical foundations, such as the “telling of histories, the celebration of language, religion, cultural traditions, and through a romantic identification with the historical landscape” (4). The crucial dilemma for Pākehā nationalism is that there has always been “another people… another history” (4). As such, Pākehā are positioned as the “second settlers” (Turner 116) and this sets up a dynamic in which “Māori are both a block to Pākehā becoming and the anchor on which [their] becoming relies” (4).
I want to elaborate on Bell’s claim with reference to the film *This Way of Life*. The relationship between the main subject, Peter Karena, and his Māori stepfather is an enactment of this dynamic. Peter Karena is a Pākehā immigrant from Australia. Just like the early settlers, Peter is from somewhere else, and as such he is one of the “second settlers” (Turner 116). In childhood, he was brought to live in Aotearoa New Zealand by his stepfather. Peter has adopted a way of life that is derivative of Māori cultural traditions. This informs his sense of self and belonging, and has augmented his connections with his rural community. The film attributes much of Peter’s troubles to his estranged stepfather, who will no longer allow him to occupy the Karena’s ancestral land. A culmination of events forces Peter to become a contemporary land squatter. This is Peter’s lament and avowal:

This is my home. This is my community. This is where I’d decided I was going to live. Working on options right now... such as? Living like gypsies, sell our truck and ride around on horses, and live on the side of the roads.

Peter has a fantasy that it is possible to subsist off his rural environment. He refuses the nearby city, opting instead for what he perceives to be a more moral, autonomous and authentic rural way of life. In this regard, Peter personifies the taming nature myth: he feels happy and content when he is free to work the land into productivity. Peter also believes that he can break from his stepfather to re-create himself. However, self-creation is the fantasy of a person without a past or one who wants to forget it. Here is a perverse recasting of notions of settlement and of relations with the Pākehā settler. Peter’s ‘becoming’ as a self-governing settler is blocked by the Māori cultural traditions on which he also relies upon for his sense of identity. This narrative of displacement that threads through this film, links to the larger complexities with biculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The term ‘biculturalism’ results from a particular re-reading of the principles of the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi for contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand society. Bell adds that the rhetoric of biculturalism implies an inclusive agreement
between “two cultural wholes, complete in themselves”; however, what it does not do is “encourage engagement or connection between Māori and Pākehā” (5). Bicultural rhetoric privileges the rights of Pākehā as tangata tiriti, (people of the Treaty) while it only acknowledges “Māori culture and existence” as tangata whenua (people of the land) (5).14 As such, biculturalism remains contested, without any agreement between Māori and Pākehā on how to put the Treaty’s principles into practice. Myths of identity and belonging, which are evident in my sample of films, tend to camouflage this perplexity. Myth operates on the term ‘bicultural’ to romanticise its meaning, implying that it connotes ‘agreement’ or ‘settlement’ but what remains concealed is the level of cultural and social disharmony that defies resolution.

For Bell, biculturalism is a recent construct, “just the latest version of this nationalist project” to express a unifying national identity (5). Moreover, Bell asserts that while biculturalism does involve an important shift towards a politics of inclusion, it does this only on the terms of Pākehā dominance and centrality:

The classic Pākehā nationalist stance is thus to feel positive towards Māori cultural expression, but uneasy about any suggestion that our relation to Māori people should come with any accommodation of political claims for rights, recognition, redress, and uneasy about the idea that Māori might be different to us in some ways... (5)

For example, expressions of Māori culture, such as the karakia (prayer) offered in the opening scene of Kaikohe Demolition, add a certain depth to the film’s expression of an Aotearoa New Zealand culture. However, in terms of making a contribution to the larger bicultural project, the Pākehā cultural narrative is, according to Bell, rather “empty” (3). Bell borrows this term from Malcolm McLean who asserts that Pākehā culture occupies “the silent centre” of Aotearoa

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14 Here this discussion also connects with the other myths that associate European culture with law and logic, and Māori culture with the flora and fauna of the land.
New Zealand’s national culture (108). McLean hypothesises that the lack of obligation to identify a specific Pākehā culture is also the block to its expression. Turner makes the related point that Pākehā have a “weak sense of history” from which to draw but in its place “a local pride in pragmatism” (21). I claim that it is within this context of “unsettlement” that certain Pākehā rural myths (e.g. the rural Arcadia myth) are reproduced within the retelling of 19th century settlement (20). Bell asserts that Pākehā “don’t remember how their coming here was at the cost of the tangata whenua” (3). Her notion of the “empty centre” is thus premised on the active forgetting of colonisation (1). The paradox is that Pākehā dominance comes at the cost of cultural emptiness as well as historical amnesia. This key idea in Bell’s research also has traction within my film set.

In *The Last Resort*, the myth of a united national identity manifests where colonial and contemporary land dispossession collide. In rural Opoutama, the State had historically claimed ownership of the land from local iwi and then set up a park where three generations of New Zealanders took their holidays. This is the first link to dispossession. In the year 2004, a capitalist investor from the city buys the park so as to develop exclusive holiday homes for an elite international clientele. This second link to dispossession invokes a mythologised sense of bicultural identity and nationalism in opposition to the Globalising Other. As the campers are served with eviction notices, local iwi take up occupation of the land [see fig. 10]. What emerges is a mythified bond between Pākehā and Māori over land claims, which reproduce the paradoxes of early settlement articulated by Bell and Turner. The active forgetting of colonialism, amid contentious claims to land, foreshore and seabed, displaces hostility and redirects it at a constructed Globalising Other. Historical amnesia impacts on the way that New Zealanders respond to the perceived threats of the present. As is evident in *The Last Resort*, the filmmakers do not acknowledge (or remember) their own political ancestry and as such they unwittingly reproduce myths of bicultural accord.
In referencing the work of Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins, Bell makes an important conceptual link between the comforts of Pākehā centrism and the discomfort felt by other cultural groups in Aotearoa New Zealand, such as Māori and Pasifika. I want to link this insight to the way that my films operate to position cinematic spectators. To offer some context, Jones and Jenkins were teachers at Auckland University in the late 1990s. Both had an interest in “teaching biculturally” and sought to achieve this through cross-cultural dialogical input (Bell 7). A content analysis of their students’ regular journal entries indicated that Māori students felt dissatisfied with how the “views and interests of the Pākehā students and teacher” dominated discussions (7). The following year the class was split by ethnicity. This time Pākehā students expressed their displeasure at being separated and articulated a desire to learn about other cultures and worldviews. Jones concluded that the Pākehā students’ desire to be with their Māori classmates represented a need for redemption; “to be reassured that they/we weren’t seen as those nasty colonising types” (7). Bell also claims that while the students desired to learn about cultural composition and difference, “they expected to do so on their terms. They expected to be enriched - and reassured in their liberty - by this new knowledge” (8). I argue that this dynamic is also applicable to how my set of films position spectators. A comparable desire to know, and to know about the Other more generally – what I’ve already described as epistephilia – characterises documentary film. The desire for mastery of cultural knowledge also connects documentary with the
legacy of Western ocularcentrism. Viewing these films presents an opportunity to acquire cultural knowledge, in which Pākehā spectators may also wish to disassociate themselves from “those nasty colonising types”, as described by the students of Jones and Jenkins (8).

Indeed, this seems to be a pattern in Aotearoa New Zealand cinema. Merata Mita, as well as Brendan Hokowhitu, has argued that Aotearoa New Zealand films privilege Western subject positions. Even those films that attempt to portray a Māori worldview still serve a need for Pākehā subjectivity. In a scene from Kaikohe Demolition, for instance, John Zielinski takes the film crew (and spectators) on a tour of the Kaikohe backblocks so as to see (and come to know) where some of the Māori demolition drivers live. The voyeuristic journey indulges the documentary desire to see and know as it facilitates the comforts of Pākehā centricism. The voyeuristic impulse acts as a cover for enabling a Western subject position. Just like it was for the students of Jones and Jenkins, it seems that this film is serving an expectation that Pākehā viewers will be “enriched” by the viewing experience, by acquiring knowledge of the Other. Bell develops this thread by asserting that Pākehā are both privileged and burdened with an inherited Eurocentric perspective:

We still struggle with the idea of there being one universal human standard and us being it. Hence, we don’t have culture. We are just normal and right. The normality we feel at being the dominant, national culture, is reinforced by our inheritance of the white, western heritage of Enlightened thought (6).

Bell acknowledges that the desire to know the Other in some form is inevitable within the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand. She suggests that citizens should not “give up seeking to know” but must at the same time understand that no one can ever achieve “a final set of knowledge or a final judgment about anyone, or anything” (10). This stance of humility towards knowledge

\[\text{15 Occularcentrism is the privileging of vision over the other senses in Western cultures.} \]
\[\text{16 See Hokowhitu’s ‘Understanding Whangara: Whale Rider as Simulacrum’} \]
\[\text{17 See Mita’s, ‘The Soul and the Image’}.\]
acquisition complements the work of Liu et al. who collectively view “identity as a question rather than a statement, a point of departure rather than a destination” (16). Hence, rather than formulate a fixed national identity, especially one that juxtaposes ‘kiwi’ to ‘iwi’ in the form of a binary dilemma, Liu et al. suggest it may be more productive to review identity within the context of an evolving population. For Aotearoa New Zealand citizens, this means that the construction of identities is in a continuous negotiation. It also means that New Zealanders should look at how contemporary settlement is addressed. Subjects of my films view their rural communities as a social space where the politics of identity is constantly negotiated. Weathering the impact of neoliberal reforms, for instance, produced the resilient rural subject. To move forward politically, and biculturally, Bell proposes a shift from placing an emphasis on land to a more balanced relationship with people. By unmasking rural myths that impact on relations with land and people, I will address this site of tension.

Documentary film likewise facilitates the belief that anyone “should be able to know anything and everything” (9). However, my film examples do provide some signs of Māori resistance to cultural appropriation. In several scenes from Land of the Long White Cloud, for example, some Māori fishermen discuss aspects of their culture, including their spiritual connection to the local area. Here Habicht’s participatory style is comparable to the ‘talking-in’ method used by Barry Barclay, and also parallels his belief in the power of an inclusive community:

Any worthwhile film involves a certain arrogance - the arrogance to call a hui, especially as a young person (under 50). If you are not brave enough to call a hui, you do not have much right to be handling the extraordinary resources it takes to make a film. Then again, the process involves humility, the humility to bend the technology to the rules of the hui - to allow the people, the whole people, to speak (qtd. in Murray 13).

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18 For more on Barclay’s filmmaking method, see Stuart Murray’s Images of Dignity, Chapter 2.
Land of the Long White Cloud attempts to offer cultural knowledge from a Māori worldview, rather than as something to be absorbed into a Pākehā worldview. Jones suggests that an expression of humility, such as “a productive acceptance of ignorance of the other”, may be a pathway to addressing biculturalism (qtd in Bell 9). However, Bell also states that “productive ignorance” does not equate to “ignorance is bliss” but rather it “suggests a certain humility towards our possibilities of knowing, to what we might accumulate by way of knowledge” (10). This expression of humility connects with Barclay’s notion of film as “a hui”, which is akin to a gathering on film (qtd. in Murray 13). Habicht’s films, for instance, express this humility in the way that all the subjects within his films are given the opportunity to speak and thus retain ownership of their stories. In doing so, his films offer what Bell refers to as “humility towards our possibilities of knowing”, and they also provide a template for participatory filmmaking (10).

Unsettlement, Displacement and Globalisation

[T]he pervasive effect of contemporary settler culture in New Zealand... [is] a problem of living in the present, or living without history... [T]he will to forget the trauma of dislocation and unsettlement has taken the form of a psychic structure.

(Turner 21)

Existing in a state of forgetfulness, as Turner posits, enables contemporary citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand to live ahistorically. However, a person without history, suggests Turner, is a person not “fully alive to an experience of place” (22). This can produce such conditions as loss, melancholy and nostalgia. For their relevance to my project, I expound on two specific conditions. First, there is a condition of “contemporary unsettlement” (20). As expressed by Turner, this condition connects the historical trauma of “unsettlement” with the way that citizens respond to the perceived threats of the present (20). The construction of a controlling Globalising Other amid protest over the foreshore and seabed exemplifies its persistence. Second, I claim that living in the midst of unsettled biculturalism has produced a condition of ‘uncanny displacement’. I have devised
this term to describe a subjective sense of unease with the land that citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand occupy, celebrate and defend. A Freudian analysis of ‘das Unheimliche’ or ‘The Uncanny’ characterises an experience of unhomeliness: an unsettling sense of fear that is felt within the interior of one’s home.  

According to Dziuban, Freud’s case studies of das Unheimliche all share a common structural characteristic: “they are grounded in the fear of the return of what we would rather not remember, what we did not expect, and what we do not wish to encounter at all” (3). As this characteristic relates to settler anxiety and comparable contemporary concerns, I extend Freud’s theory to the level of the nation, to discuss uncanny displacement as a sense of unease with land and identity, arising from within the interior of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Lynette Read, Sam Neill and Judy Rymer have also connected das Unheimliche, the nation, and Aotearoa New Zealand cinema. Both Neill and Rymer assert that the recurring cinematic representation of an individual who appears to be at odds with the landscape reflects the larger societal struggle to locate a national identity. Merata Mita makes a comparable point in her groundbreaking essay, ‘The Soul and the Image’, where she claims that the depiction of white men and women at odds with their environment, their country and themselves is a recurring theme in many Aotearoa New Zealand films (47). For this reason she describes the Aotearoa New Zealand film industry as being “a white, neurotic one” that is driven by “repression and fear” (47). Mita’s points corroborates Turner’s concept of “contemporary unsettlement” (20). She claims that films made through a Pākehā lens fail to acknowledge that there is “a situation to be resolved” (48), especially with regard to the vexed relation between identity and “the colonial syndrome of dislocation” (47). In my analysis, I discuss the depiction of unease as a collision of rural myth with a rural reality that most

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19 For further reading, see Freud’s ‘The Uncanny’ and also Dziuban’s ‘Incorporating the Uncanny. Das Unheimliche as a Cultural Experience’.  
20 See Read’s ‘Rain and the Tradition of Art Cinema’. Read argues that the film Cinema of Unease: A Personal Journey by Sam Neill positions Aotearoa New Zealand’s national cinema as reflective of a collective troubled psyche.  
21 I want to acknowledge Jo Smith’s article, ‘What the Digital Allows’. In her discussion of Kaikohe Demolition, she claims that director Florian Habicht produces a “reverse-shot” of Mita’s “white neurotic industry” through his use of digital technology and by foregrounding the people of this community.
spectators would rather not encounter or remember. This is especially evident in the way that Habicht’s subjective view of rural life, which is often celebratory, also concedes to the unease of rural realities. His carefully composed signature landscape shots can be strongly evocative of Arcadian myths. However, as tense social histories come to the surface, the aesthetic narration alters to evoke unease. Unsettling rural landscapes expose darkening skies, a rusting car, an abandoned farmhouse, and a dead cow partially submerged in a river. The juxtaposition of shots expresses recognition of conflicting rural connotations, and reveals that romantic rural myths appear to be in a state of crisis.

Globalisation, the nation, and das Unheimliche also interconnect, for instance, through discussions of ‘homelessness’. One case in point is Kathleen R. Arnold’s exploration of homelessness in terms of the globalisation of the economy and how this impacts on views of national identity and citizenship.\(^{22}\) She claims that the ideal modern citizen is one who is perceived as financially independent, and thus can claim ‘a home’, in both a literal and a metaphorical sense. Attaining work and a home in the aftermath of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis presents many challenges for citizens. As is the case in This Way of Life, Peter Karena is a displaced land squatter who desires a home, while his wife Colleen has embraced camping in mythical Arcadia as a way to compensate for her sense of dislocation. In this context, Colleen reflects on global change and queries if “the world” will allow this family to persist with their rural way of life.

Analogous to Arnold’s position, Alison Brysk and Gershon Shafir both argue that globalisation pushes people “out of place”, producing transnational flows of “people, production, investment, information, ideas, and authority” (Brysk et al. 3).\(^{23}\) This connects with Liu et al.’s point that globalisation is a challenge or an opportunity as it “brings people together in both harmony and conflict” (11). It also pushes people across borders, out of local traditions, and alters the nature of citizenship. Subjects within my set of documentaries regard globalisation as an

\(^{22}\) See Kathleen R Arnold’s Homelessness, Citizenship, and Identity: The Uncanniness of Late Modernity.

\(^{23}\) See People Out Of Place: Globalization, Human Rights and the Citizen Gap. Etd. by Brysk and Shafir.
unwanted and controlling influence on local identity, economy, and cultures. However, I argue that it is the perceived threat of globalisation that is producing an experience of the uncanny from within the nation. Although a sense of unease and displacement with one's home is nothing new for the European settler-citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand, the perception of a new era of global transformation has intensified such feelings. As such, the cinematic reproduction of rural myths offers a form of recompense.

For my contextual discussion of *This Way of Life* and *Land of the Land White Cloud*, I will draw on the work of Fredric Jameson and Jerry Mander to elucidate the impacts of globalisation through my film analyses. Both theorists advocate for a politics of resistance to globalisation. Similarly, the subjects within my films promote 'local’ over ‘global’ in various rural contexts. Though in contrast to this view, subjects advocate for autonomy as an expression of their rural resilience.

**Theorising Documentary Representation**

When a documentary “speaks about” something, when “We speak about it to you”, for example, it speaks through its composition of shots, its editing together of images, and its use of music, among other things. Everything we see and hear represents not only the historical world but also how the film's maker wants to speak about that world. (Nichols 67)

In this section, I examine the desires that are implicit in the documentary representation of my selected rural myths. I also elaborate on three of Nichols’ modes of documentary filmmaking: the observational, the participatory and the performative modes, which all construct a particular perception of rural life.

**Documentary and Desire**

From their historical foundation, cinematic moving images that captured everyday occurrences, such as the Lumière's *L’arrivée d’un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895), were often cited as ‘films of actuality’. Documentary claimed to be
capturing objective lived reality, though there were some early reservations amid such claims. In the 1930s, when Grierson described his filmmaking style as a “creative treatment of actuality” this implied that he had implicitly recognised that documentary film required more than just actuality (qtd. in Nichols 6). Creative treatment can include, but is not limited to, the manipulation of light (mood, tone), composition (frame), camera positioning (perspective), musical accompaniment (ambience, pace), and selected and ordered editing (narration). Nichols suggests that “creative treatment” implies the poetic license of fiction whereas “actuality” reaffirms the obligations of “the journalist and the historian” (6). It is in this space of tension between actuality and creative realisation that Barthes’ understanding of mythology takes shape relative to documentary filmmaking practice. The interplay between denotation and connotation makes this possible. Spectators may view an image of a carefully composed pastoral landscape in This Way of Life, for example, and mistake its connotative meanings (e.g. an authentic way of life) as simply denotative. Creative romanticisation of the image (e.g. natural lighting, perspectival composition) thus reveals how the filmmaker wishes to “speak about” rural life to spectators (67).

Elizabeth Cowie’s work, Recording Reality, Desiring the Real, explores the manner in which documentary films involve spectators in desiring as well as knowing. She asserts that in recording actuality, “photography and cinematography address two distinct and apparently contradictory desires” (2), First is the desire for reality as knowledge (epistephilia), by means of observation and analysis. Second is the desire for reality as spectacle (scopophilia). In the case of the latter, documentary film associates with the visual pleasures of cinema; a fascination with images of actuality. Cowie argues that with documentary film, pleasure comes from the communication of knowledge and from “the re-presentation of actuality” (2). With regard to my film set, each documentary engages spectators in desiring to see and know rural life in modern Aotearoa New Zealand.

As Cowie asserts that the Grierson space of creative realisation is always shot through with unconscious desire, documentary can fall prey to “a loss of the real in its narratives of reality” (1). In this regard, the narrativisation of the sights and
sounds of reality privileges the creative spectacularisation of actuality. This would imply, according to Cowie, that Grierson’s definition left out mention of the desire for knowledge (epistephilia). In the same time period that Grierson was defining his documentary style, Bertolt Brecht expressed this frustration with regard to the functionalised construction of reality:

>The situation is becoming so complex that less than ever does a simple reproduction of reality tell us anything about reality. A photograph of Krupps or the AEG yields hardly anything about those industries. True reality has taken refuge in the functional” (qtd. in Cowie 1).

Both Cowie and Brecht refer to the tension between realism and representation. For Cowie, this tension correlates with the wider debate about the “historical and social determinations of the social reality re-presented” (1). Such concerns have a direct bearing on my thesis. For example, a representation of a picturesque Northland landscape may say very little about the social reality of the rural downturn in the Far North. Nor may it help Auckland residents to fully understand the social “interests of the rural community” as the city’s boundaries encroach ever northward (Macpherson 194). This corroborates Nichols’ point that “documentary is not a reproduction of reality, it is a representation of the world we already occupy” (13). Representation refers to the process of using a medium, such as film, to construct a version of the real world. With regard to documentary films, this is achieved through certain “technologies and styles”, as well as modes of filmmaking (xiii).

**Documentary Modes of Filmmaking**

Nichols’ modes can be thought of as basic ways of organising texts (documentary) in relation to certain recurrent conventions. All of my films operate in an integrative way to deploy the observational, participatory, and performative modes of documentary filmmaking. Each mode “emphasizes different cinematic resources or techniques” as a means to construct a representation of rural life (30). Nichols describes the observational mode as “a
direct engagement with the everyday life of subjects as observed by an unobtrusive camera” (31). This mode is used in Kaikohe Demolition, for instance, to capture the demolition derby scenes from a wide-angle lens; similarly, in The Last Resort an inconspicuous camera is positioned as witness to protests over rural land sales.

Beyond observation, Nichols’ participatory mode operates to emphasise the direct “interaction between filmmaker and subject” (31). Participatory filmmaking often involves the use of interviews or conversations. Habicht, for instance, is often heard off-camera voicing his encouragement as the subjects make use of their “prior experience and habits to be themselves in the face of a camera” (8). The participatory mode may also utilise archival film material to explore historical issues. Here, the “participatory emphasis shifts from the interaction between filmmaker and subject to the one between viewer and assembled material” (180) Particularly effective in The Last Resort is the use of archival footage of the 2004 hikoi on Parliament, remediated alongside the recorded ‘real-time’ occupation of Opoutama Beach.24 Narration thus represents a meta-history of emotional interaction at both a national and local level.

Closely related to the participatory, Nichols’ performative mode “emphasizes the subjective or expressive aspect of the filmmaker’s own involvement with a subject” and attempts to intensify the spectators’ reaction to this involvement (31). In Land of the Long White Cloud, the subjects often turn the questions back to Habicht as a way to promote friendly and intimate dialogue. In one instance, a local fisherman asks Habicht directly if he has ever felt true love. In this example, spectators are privy to affecting interactions between filmmaker and subject. Here Habicht’s principal mode of filmmaking is participatory, while his response activates a moment of performativity. Indeed, in interviews Habicht has confirmed that he desired to make a “very subjective documentary” (qtd. in Smith 1). In another example from This Way of Life, the filmmaker steps in front of the camera to confront Peter Karena’s stepfather. This is expressly illustrative

24 In Māori language, ‘hikoi’ translates to a ‘walk’ or a ‘march’. In this instance, it is a ‘protest march’.
of how spectators can be drawn into the subjective opinions or personal experiences of the filmmaker.

These three modes of documentary filmmaking contribute to a particular view of rural life, one that is inevitably slanted by the subjectivities of each filmmaker. All the filmmakers in my study utilise various techniques and styles within the different modes to express a category of cinema that is deeply embedded within rural mythology. As we shall see, the films reproduce certain rural myths, which emphasise and problematise relations to people and place within the nation.

**Documentary Representation of Rural Life and Rural Myths**

Nichols proposes that there are three basic assumptions about documentary films that are commonly shared by documentarians and spectators: they are “about reality”, “about real people”, and they “tell stories about what really happened” (33). These assumptions relate in large part to the indexical quality of cinematic sounds and images to reproduce the “pro-filmic event” (34). Such assumptions also relate to the reality as knowledge aspect of documentary spectatorship. The indexical quality “is what makes the documentary image appear as a vital source of evidence [and knowledge] about the world” (34). More than this, documentary makes use of such evidence to construct a particular perspective of the world. In my set of films, spectators view a romanticised depiction of rural life, which relates to the desire for reality as spectacle aspect of documentary spectatorship.

I argue that myth within documentary operates through a conflation of Cowie’s two levels of reality. It works on the cinematic sights and sounds of rural life to put forth a new (albeit fabricated) reality, one in which connotation masquerades as denotation. Myth thus complicates the pleasures that are offered by documentary spectatorship. It alters the indexical evidence so that a single wide-shot of rural Kaikohe or coastal Opoutama also connotes ‘the great rural way of life’ or indeed the “Kiwi Dream” (Phillips 5). Consider also how the archival footage of the 2004 hikoi in *The Last Resort* re-presents a fabricated unification between Māori and Pākehā as they protest State asset sales to foreign
investors. Spectators view the newsreel footage as verification that this historic event really happened yet the mythical representation alters the indexical evidence. Here the filmmakers of *The Last Resort* have not only constructed a representation of an imagined internal bicultural unity, but also an illusory external Globalising Other.

Cowie positions documentary film as a cinematic project that engages the spectator in desiring to “know and experience reality through recorded images and sounds of reality” (1). The term documentary also includes the idea of a filmic structure that is “unified by a philosophy, ideology, and aesthetic, by an ordering of that material from a chosen human perspective” (Sobchack and Sobchack, 348). As such, the filmmaker acts as a creative “mediator” between the spectator and the event that is represented by the “raw footage” of actuality (348). This supports Cowie’s assertion that documentary is also a form of “embodied storytelling” that presents narratives of reality, and engages spectators “with the actions and feelings of social actors, like characters in fiction” (3). All of my filmmakers use techniques and styles within modes of documentary filmmaking to blend the images and sounds of reality with fantasy. In *Land of the Long White Cloud*, for instance, Habicht uses a 1950s musical soundtrack to inject an intertextual sense of fun into his storytelling. Whereas in *The Last Resort*, King-Jones and Wright have selected and ordered archival home movie footage of one family’s seaside camping holiday, which creates a sense of nostalgia for something (or some place) that may already be lost. This also exemplifies how the participatory mode of filmmaking generates collaboration and emotional interaction between filmmaker, subject and spectator.

Documentary representation of rural myths, such as the nationalised dream of land ownership, thus compensates spectators for their sense of loss and displacement with this dream. For citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand, identity is, and always has been, a concept that is deeply embedded in the sounds and images of rural people and place. My documentaries engage spectators in the pleasures of looking at, and identifying with, rural people and place. As Sobchack and Sobchack point out, “all images are selective and partial representations of
some unseen and larger context” (369). My task will be to read the rural myths that are reproduced by my selected films via a textual analysis within the historical contexts that construct such myths.

**Chapter Conclusion: Reflections on Rural Representations**

Myth is a type of collective illusion, a story that society tells itself in order to justify its own ideology and processes. For Barthes, mythical language is a highly motivated manner of speech that is informed by a specific context. Within the historical context of 19th century European settlement, Aotearoa New Zealand was mythified through the dominant culture’s media representations (books, lithographs, newspapers, posters) as a free land of bountiful opportunity and moral wholesomeness. The great rural way of life myth circulated glowing accounts of a new Eden. This myth suppressed any displeasing details, such as the fact that groups of Māori (the first settlers) had long occupied the land. Contemporary settlers continue to buy into a “perpetuated and commodified” version of this colonial rural myth (Bell 145). Romanticised rural representations sustain their popularity, while the majority of the populace live and work in urban areas. This suggests a nostalgic desire for a perceived great rural way of life. Indeed, documentary representation of modern rural life positions spectators as desiring and knowing consumers of rural myths.

As Barthes reminds us, myths have an organising and controlling function, as they are the result of specific power structures in a certain society and at a certain time. Myth also functions in a concealing manner, hiding its own construction and intent, so that all mythical representations appear as naturalised or commonplace reality. In *Kaikohe Demolition*, for instance, the representation of rural life is structured around landscape images of green rolling hills and thermal waters, as opposed to images of the commercial rural industries upon which Northland’s economy relies. Though this may be a reflection of how such industries have all but disappeared from the landscape since the rural downturn of the 1980s. Neoliberalism altered the reality of rural life for the subjects who live within these communities, and in so doing produced
the resilient rural subject, a concept that I will expand on in my forthcoming analysis. Within my films, images of rural land and seascapes are predominately romanticised as spectacle in their re-presentation, a feast for the eyes, and ripe for viewing consumption. In this regard, rural Aotearoa New Zealand has attained a highly desirable and yet mythical status. Rural mythologies continue to promote rural Aotearoa New Zealand as the real Aotearoa New Zealand. As such, the possibility of rural autonomy maintains the “Kiwi Dream” (Phillips 5). The desire for land ownership drives this myth. Correspondingly, nostalgic desire for an unspoilt rural landscape (reminiscent of the Romantic tradition) compels the myth. In these ways the romantic dream of the great rural way of life lives on in my films.

In the forthcoming chapters, I analyse the rural Arcadia and taming nature myths, through selected film examples. My discussion also interweaves and exemplifies myths of identity and belonging. Trinh advances the important point that “to raise the question of identity is to reopen again the discussion on the self/other relationship in its enactment of power relations” (1). As documentary representation inherited the legacy of the Western ways of seeing, it inevitably positions spectators in a self/other power dichotomy. I explore perceptions of self/other as conveyed by the subjects within my films. All of these films express a certain hostility and intolerance towards the Globalising Other, which I claim is the result of feeling displaced with land and identity. Tensions produced by the unresolved land claims represented in The Last Resort, for instance, displace hostility towards the Bicultural Other, and redirects it at the Globalising Other. As such, the anxieties that surround Aotearoa New Zealand’s bicultural status confound the articulation of self/other identities within the context of my films.

In this chapter, I have elaborated on how filmic representations of a collective nostalgia for the romantic rural, and a desire to experience or return to nature, maintain rural myths. Myth is an important constituent of human existence. My task for the following chapters is to analyse the selected myths that tell stories about contemporary rural life, and thus position spectators as desiring and knowing subjects. Creative treatment, such as use of colour, light, camera angles,
as well as the pace, logic and elegance of image and sound editing, all enhance
the pleasures of the documentary spectatorship of modern rural life. My analysis
of selected shots and sequences will further exemplify how certain rural myths
manifest, and are reproduced, within the context of my documentary films.
CHAPTER TWO: Rural Arcadia, Neoliberalism and the Foreshore and Seabed Debate

In this chapter, I explore how *Kaikohe Demolition* (2004) and *The Last Resort* (2006) each, in turn, reproduces the rural Arcadia myth. I argue that these films reproduce the myth of an idyllic, harmonious rural existence while masking the unresolved issues of neoliberalism and land ownership within the context of biculturalism and the Treaty of Waitangi. My examination includes a contextual discussion of two key historical impacts on rural communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. First, discussion of the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s provides the context for my analysis of *Kaikohe Demolition*. As Nairn et al. argue, the implementation of neoliberalist ideologies produced “forms of inequality and social exclusion” within rural areas, as well as the economic exclusion of rural subjects from the State (2). Second, discussion of the Foreshore and Seabed Act 2004 provides the context for my analysis of *The Last Resort*, focusing on the intensification of unresolved Treaty claims over land and water.

Themes of land and identity feature prominently in both documentary films. *Kaikohe Demolition* celebrates the rural environment, whereas *The Last Resort* questions its ownership. I argue that the documentary representation of these issues is part of the broader process of rural myth making. Accordingly, the rural Arcadia myth offers a form of compensation for the subjects within these films, and for its spectators. Specifically, the films engage in the romanticisation of rural life while masking the interrelated issues of biculturalism and what Turner refers to as “contemporary unsettlement” (20). As I have explicated in Chapter One, Turner defines “unsettlement” as a psychological condition that is a form of historical amnesia. To extend this concept, I claim that unsettled biculturalism has produced a condition of displacement with land and identity, which has meant that New Zealanders live with an uneasy sense of never quite feeling at home.25 I use the term ‘uncanny displacement’ to describe a sense of dislocation from the land, which the citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand celebrate and defend.

25 In *Cinema of Unease: A Personal Journey* by Sam Neil, New Zealand’s national cinema is theorised as a reflection of a collective “troubled psyche”, which is embedded in relationships to the land.
**Kaikohe Demolition (2004)**

*Kaikohe Demolition* was filmed on location over three years preceding its 2004 release, and records the lives of a rural community group brought together by a shared love of demolition derbies. However, the social connections documented by the film are also due to certain socio-historical and political circumstances. What is undeniable is that the neoliberal economic reforms that began in the 1980s have had both historical and ongoing effects on this rural community. My discussion focuses on two aspects of these changes. First, I discuss the material effects of neoliberal policy, such as the withdrawal of Government subsidies from the rural sector. Second, I explore key components of neoliberalist ideology, including views of individual responsibility and resilience, which intensify whenever the film’s subjects defend their rural positions. While this documentary seems highly ambivalent towards neoliberalist principles, the subjects within this film unwittingly personify them. I will contextualise this socio-political history in conjunction with a discussion of the rural Arcadia myth as it romanticises relationships to rural people and place. Of particular relevance is the defense of ‘rurality’ staged by the film’s subjects, alongside their perceived division of ‘Rural’ and the ‘Other’.

**The Last Resort (2006)**

*The Last Resort* (2006) was filmed mostly on location in rural Hawkes Bay, as well as in other rural and urban locales throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. The narrative begins in Opoutama, at the site of a seaside camping ground that also occupies ancestral iwi land. The film documents the emotional and cultural response to the on sale of this site to a city-based developer. It also points to the larger issue of contemporary rural land sales within Aotearoa New Zealand to foreign investors, both real and imagined. Of particular significance are the Pākehā and Māori cultural claims to rural land and water, which inform the contested and nationalised debate surrounding ownership of the foreshore and seabed. My discussion of the specific socio-political history is contextualised in relation to the film’s representation of the rural Arcadia myth. This myth promotes a harmonious view of rural people and place, yet conceals the internal issues of unsettled biculturalism and unresolved Treaty claims.
Neoliberalism and Rural Communities in Aotearoa New Zealand

The subjects of *Kaikohe Demolition* and *The Last Resort* represent the first generation raised under neoliberal governance in Aotearoa New Zealand. Nairn et al. assert that this current population has either lived through, or been born into, a world that has been shaped by reforms that “transformed New Zealand’s economy and society” (11). Up until the launch of Rogernomics in 1984, Aotearoa New Zealand had been a traditional social democracy. Its national economy relied on an export-driven dairy industry, as well as on other internal agricultural productions, such as forestry and farming. Kaikohe, for example, was Northland’s epicentre for agriculture and transport. Rural commerce encouraged offshoot trade industries such as machinery depots and food outlets. Costa Botes confirms that Kaikohe was once a thriving settlement but it regressed rapidly after the “rural downturn and accompanying economic reforms of the 1980s” (1). From 1984 onwards, agricultural subsidies were either reduced or removed, rural regions were affected by rising unemployment, and social inequalities became part of everyday life. The nation’s economic gain, it seemed, was to be at the expense of social well-being for those living outside urban centres. As David Harvey indicates, social and economic transformations of this scale “do not occur by accident” (1). Aotearoa New Zealand followed a global shift in adopting political models of ‘freedom’, specifically, the advancement of economic liberalisation. I will refer to selected work of Harvey to discuss neoliberalism as global phenomenon, which I apply to the Aotearoa New Zealand context.

The Turn to Neoliberalism in New Zealand

Throughout the 1970s, Aotearoa New Zealand’s economy suffered from the effects of worldwide stagnating growth and rising inflation. In the years between 1978 and 1980, political and economic leaders in China, UK and the US began a process of economic liberalisation in an attempt to fight “inflationary stagnation” and promote what was referred to as “capitalist dynamism” (1). Harvey captures the essence of the neoliberal theoretical model as follows:

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26 My research into the neoliberal reforms revealed some disparities in the details. Some sources claim that subsidies were progressively reduced (see *Children of Rogernomics* 13) Others claim that farmers were confronted by “sudden and unexpected removal of subsidies” (see *Life After Subsidies* 1).
Neoliberalism is... a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (2).

Within this theory, the role of the State becomes to “create and preserve an institutional framework” applicable to supporting such practices (2). The State must establish, for example, systems to “secure private property rights” as well as to assure the “proper functioning of markets” in such areas as “land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution” (2). Outside these administrative roles, State influence must be kept to a minimum. According to the theory, this allows appropriate markets to dictate prices, as well as the supply and demand of goods and services. From the 1970s onwards, the powerful principles of neoliberalism reshaped the world in a brand new image.

**Three Neoliberal Principles: The Power of Ideas**

Neoliberalist ideologies have had a pervasive effect upon society in general. The dominant discourses and ideologies of neoliberalism have on a global level, according to Harvey, become the naturalised and accepted ways that people “interpret, live in, and understand the world” (3). He cites three reasons for the “emphatic turn” to neoliberal principles (2). First, the founding agents of neoliberalism used persuasive rhetoric that positively exploited the ideals of “human dignity and individual freedom” (5). In Aotearoa New Zealand, economic liberation offered a way out of the ‘price and wage freeze’ repression that had characterised everyday life in the late 1970s. Second, neoliberalism offered a solution to economic stagnation, rising unemployment and high inflation. Within the Aotearoa New Zealand economy, facilitating “the conditions of profitable capital accumulation” included the privatisation of State assets and deregulation of State control over such assets, for example, land and water (8). The costs of such measures had economic and cultural consequences, which also intensified hostilities with regard to Treaty claims, and these conflicts present as themes in my analysis of *The Last Resort*. Third, neoliberalism is, according to Harvey, a
project to achieve the “restoration of class power” (16). He points out that neoliberalism has not been especially effective in revitalising capital accrual for the majority of citizens. He argues that it has, however, been very successful in restoring “the power of the economic elite” (19). An accumulation of wealth for the elite has much to do with accumulation by dispossession of the middle and lower classes. In Aotearoa New Zealand this relates to a loss of employment, land and social rights.27 My analysis indicates that the subjects in *Kaikohe Demolition* inadvertently reinvent themselves as ‘neoliberal rural selves’ in response to the losses inflicted upon them.

**Neoliberal Reforms in Aotearoa New Zealand**

Most other nation states engaged in similar political and economic reforms. However, Nairn et al. emphasise that “New Zealand gained a reputation for going the furthest and fastest in the Western world in reforming its economy along these lines” (11). Jack Nagel reflects on this transformation:

> Between 1984 and 1993, New Zealand underwent radical economic reform, moving from what had probably been the most protected, regulated and State-dominated system of any capitalist democracy to an extreme position at the open, competitive, free-market end of the spectrum (223).

From the 1984 Election onwards, Muldoon’s fiercely protected ‘fortress New Zealand’ was liberated by the new Labour-led Government, and thus opened up to “international competition in financial and export markets” (Nairn et al. 13). This process involved floating the dollar, privatisation of a set of State assets, corporatisation of certain “state-owned commercial operations”, and reduction or sudden removal of “agricultural subsides and import tariffs” (13). By introducing these changes, the Labour Party withdrew its longstanding socialist commitment to “full employment” and “social welfare provisions” in favour of “privileging the market” in allotting employment and distributing resources (11).

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27 For further information on the neoliberal transformation in Aotearoa New Zealand, see Alistair Barry’s trilogy of documentaries, *Someone Else’s Country, In a Land of Plenty* and *A Civilised Society.*
Material Effects of Neoliberal Reforms

*Kaikohe Demolition* is a film that exemplifies the material effects of neoliberal reforms on rural communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Kaikohe was and still is the administrative centre of a region that relies on a wider rural economy. The reduction in Government assistance left the community with little opportunities for employment. Years of prolonged unemployment led to a rise in poverty, a vicious cycle of welfare entrapment, social exclusion within communities, as well as economic exclusion from the State. This State exclusion accelerated a division between rural and nation, which was further exacerbated as aggressive welfare reforms succeeded economic transformation. Kaikohe became known in the media as a ‘welfare town’ and was targeted as such by the 1990 National-led Government. Acting on Treasury advice, this Government reformed employment law and made significant welfare cuts (14). According to Nairn et al., these reforms embedded “deep structures of inequality” that are still evident (13).

Ideological Effects of Neoliberal Reforms

Welfare and employment law reforms were accompanied by the State’s use of neoliberalist rhetoric to “frame debates about unemployment and poverty in terms of welfare dependency, benefit fraud and the failure of individual responsibility” (14). Essentially, this was an exercise in shifting responsibility from the nation to the individual. I claim that it was these reforms combined with a lack of social responsibility that placed citizens in situations of dependency. Nairn et al. report that national unemployment levels peaked in 1991 “at a post-war high close to 11 per cent” and did not begin to improve until the mid-1990s (13). What is especially noteworthy is that 1991 is also the year that Kaikohe made world headlines when its children attacked ‘Santa’ during the annual Christmas Parade. According to a New Zealand Herald report, the children “turned nasty” when Santa ran out of sweets and balloons (4). The children’s emotionally charged and violent reaction was matched by a politically charged response from adults in the crowd. The victim, John Field (Santa), said that adults delivered sarcastic taunts such as, “Is this another Government cut?”

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28 For further information on this specific employment law reform see *Children of Rogernomics*, p.14.
and “Are you another Jenny Shipley?” (4). Field went on to say that he believed the attack was “a product of hard times, especially among beneficiaries” and felt that the incident was “a serious social indicator” of which “the Government should take note” (4). By one assessment, this was a rural community attack on an external Globalising Other in the form of yet another ‘white man bearing gifts’. During colonisation, such gifts often took the form of guns or other weapons of violence, which fuelled further violence, such as in the Northern Wars (1845-1846). Conversely, it was the lack of gift giving that led to violence in Kaikohe. This incident could also be read as a reaction to the ‘State violence’ that was dealt to rural people by Rogernomics. In this respect, the violence in Kaikohe was an expression of resilience in the face of deep frustration. I propose that in this film, and in the other films in my set, the reaction to State violence has become both internalised and displaced onto an external Globalising Other.

**Rural Resilience, Violence, and Neoliberalism**

By the time *Kaikohe Demolition* was released in 2004, the inhabitants of this Northland community had long been transformed into neoliberalist subjects. Nairn et al. state that neoliberalist ideologies and “the discourses of dependency and individual responsibility were well established” by the early millennium (14). However, the reforms, although an expression of State violence, were met with statements of ‘rural resilience’ instead of acts of ‘political resistance’. This is an important distinction to clarify. ‘Resilience’ suggests ‘toughness’ or ‘hardiness’, which are connotations often attached to mythical representations of ‘Kiwi’ citizens.30 ‘Resistance’, in contrast, connotes political “confrontation” or “opposition”. In a pre-neoliberal sense, resilience conveys an ambivalence that resistance does not. Political resistance directs violence back towards the State, but as my analysis indicates, the subjects in *Kaikohe Demolition* have long moved on from the outward violence of 1991. Unconsciously, they have transformed themselves into resilient and ‘neoliberal rural selves’. In this regard, rural resilience can be interpreted as a disguised form of resistance or as a mode of internalised complicity with State violence. To exemplify this point, consider the

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29 For more on the Northern wars, see http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/new-zealand-wars/page-2
30 I have deliberately used the term ‘Kiwi’ in this example to refer to the socially constructed ‘branding’ of Aotearoa New Zealand citizens.
following examples. Published in 2005, *Life after Subsidies* was a paper prepared by the Federated Farmers of New Zealand (Inc.), an organisation representing farmers and rural communities:

... Life after subsidies is better than farming that is dependent upon government handouts. . . . Farming families can live well and prosper by their own efforts. . . . The removal of farm subsidies in New Zealand has given birth to a vibrant, diversified and growing rural economy. (1)

While all these statements illustrate rural resilience, they are also examples of entrenched neoliberalist ideology. They exemplify an acceptance of individual responsibility over any reliance on the State. There is a double-edged sword involved in ‘standing on your own two feet’. By doing so, the residents of Kaikohe are living and embracing the very ideology that divides them from the nation.

To elaborate the correlation between rural resilience and neoliberalism, I draw upon Naomi Klein’s *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. Klein refers to the trauma that is caused in the body by electroshock therapy and applies this principle, by analogy, to the social trauma that is experienced by citizens living under neoliberal governance. In commenting on Klein’s theory, Olsessen et al. argue that under neoliberalism, the transfer of State control of the economy to the private sector creates a situation wherein “individuals are transformed into self-reliant entrepreneurial selves” and “held accountable for their individual free-market ‘choices’” (153). As my analysis indicates the demolition drivers of Kaikohe have adopted a similar position of self-reliance. In fact, they are ‘poster boys’ for neoliberalism as their participation in the derby events is illustrative of what impoverished rural subjects can achieve through their own resourcefulness. Klein argues that neoliberalism uses ‘disasters’, both man-made and natural, to promote its own corporatising interests. Neoliberalism was an orchestrated economic and social ‘disaster’ for rural communities. Rural decline altered the physical landscape and created an ideological crisis in everyday rural life. It was within this space of trauma that neoliberal ideologies
took hold through processes of rural myth making. Subjects in Kaikohe Demolition unconsciously assume the rural Arcadia myth as compensation for their everyday conditions under neoliberalism. This corroborates Barthes' notion that mythology "harmonizes with the world, not as it is, but as it wants to create itself... at once an understanding of reality and a complicity with it" (156).

Indeed, within the perceived 'rural Arcadia' of Kaikohe examples of 'rural resilience' and complicity can be found, especially in the way that the subjects within this film celebrate their 'idyllic' rural locality. However, at the heart of this group is a desire for demolition, which is an internalised expression of 'rural violence'. Paradoxes in the practices of the demolition drivers are further explored in my forthcoming analysis. Consider, for example, how the violent spectacle of the demolition event operates to draw the community together.

Nonetheless, the event exemplifies a test of individual resilience in the way that the competition produces only one winner. Another striking ambiguity is in the set up between John Zielinski and his habit of bankrolling cars for his employees. His money enables their participation, but it also procures his 'Derby King' title.

**Kaikohe Demolition and the Rural Arcadia Myth**

In the remainder of this section, I provide a textual analysis of a selection of shots and scenes from Kaikohe Demolition, discussing how various techniques and modes of documentary representation exemplify the workings of the rural Arcadia myth. I argue that the film presents a romanticised perspective of rural existence while masking and suppressing the economic and social reality of rural life in Kaikohe. For my textual analysis, I have selected three interconnected sites of violence and/or resilience: Kaikohe district, the Kaikohe Speedway track, and Ngāwhā Springs. First, I examine the forms of violence that are associated with Kaikohe in its rural and urban backblocks. Second, I discuss the violence that is contained within the derby track as well as the resilience that is expressed by the drivers. Third, I elaborate on the therapeutic value of the thermal hot springs as a site where the men find their inner calm, and as Phillip Matthews observes, where they "seem to be at their least aggressive and most philosophical" (1).

Indeed, in this rural Arcadia, the hot springs are the only place where the drivers reflect on everyday life.
To ‘read’ these three rural sites, I borrow from John Fiske and the method he used to ‘read the beach’ in his seminal essay from *Reading the Popular* (1989). In this essay, Fiske understands ‘the beach’ as both a signifying text and as a site of nature/culture collision: “Semiotically, the beach can be read as a text, and by text, I mean a signifying construct of potential meanings operating on a number of levels” (43). I will apply a similar reading of the documentary representation of Kaikohe. The nature/culture collision cuts right to the heart of the rural Arcadia myth (43). The desire to be closer to nature is driven by an expectation that this will produce a better and healthier life for its moral citizens. This desire reproduces one of the founding myths of settlement – the great rural way of life. A desire for Arcadia is enacted at Ngāwhā Springs, where naked bodies connect in purifying water. Analogous to Fiske’s surfers, bathing in water is where the demo drivers feel closer to nature. However, the construction of myth masks the irony that the thermal pools were built by the State. Hence, a condition of culture is mistaken as a condition of nature. Similarly, the demo drivers’ perception of everyday life in rural Kaikohe is mistaken as everyday life in rural Arcadia.

**Kaikohe, Northland, Aotearoa New Zealand: “Centre of Everything”**

Kaikohe is located in the centre of the Northland region. Originally a small Ngāpuhi settlement, it is the heartland of the country’s largest iwi. The 2006 New Zealand Census listed its population as 4,113 and it is predominately Māori (73.5%) (1). Historically, the area has been a site of violent battles between iwi, and between Māori and British soldiers during the Northern Wars (1845-1846). The Ngāpuhi war chief, Hōne Heke, “retired and died in Kaikohe in 1850” (Orange 10). Geographically, the land was formed in violence as a result of volcanic eruptions and lava flows. The town itself is situated on the slopes of a volcanic hill. Ngāwhā Springs, located approximately 5 km east of Kaikohe, is the product of a large and active geothermal field. The hot water springs are also the source of steam used at the local power station. Ngāwhā Prison, another site of contained violence, is situated nearby and is the only prison in Northland.31

Economically, the town is the administrative centre for a “farming, horticultural

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31 Ngāpuhi iwi tried to persuade the Corrections Department not to upset a local ‘taniwha’ by building the prison on thermal land. They were unsuccessful and the facility opened in 2005. See: ‘Kepa Morgan: Heeding the taniwha can help avert expensive blunders’, New Zealand Herald, 14 June 2011.
and forestry community” (10). Local trade and businesses support these activities. A Kaikohe man, Rāwiri Taiwhanga, operated “the country’s first dairy farm” in 1840 (10). Despite the rural downturn of the 1980s, “farming” is still the main economic activity (10). The 2006 New Zealand Census lists “Managers” as the main occupational group in Northland, while the most common occupational group in Kaikohe is “Labourer” (1).

Figure 11. Children of Neoliberalism. Kaikohe Demolition (2004)
Photograph credit: Franck Habicht; father of film director, Florian Habicht.

*Kaikohe Demolition* is filmed on location at sites of historical and contemporary violence, and is about a community that regularly takes part in a violent spectator sport. Narration is loosely based around a series of holiday-weekend demolition derbies. The image on the film’s DVD slipcover [see fig. 11] mingles community, friendship, and violence all within the mise-en-scène of the frame. The composition is no accident but expresses the filmmaker’s recognition of an affecting juxtaposition within this community. Smiling children in the foreground seem oblivious to the burning car in the background. While the image connotes their innocence, it also suggests that violence is a ubiquitous and normalised part of everyday life. It brings to the surface a simmering undercurrent that has had multiple effects on this community. Yet, depicting rural violence is not the main objective of this film. Botes suggests the aim of this documentary is rather to offer “a more balanced picture of life in the rural margins” while providing
“warm and empathetic portraits of some fascinating individuals” who live in Kaikohe (1). Nonetheless, the image reproduces the dominant culture’s neoliberalist ideology of maintaining independence from the State, while quelling the issues of rural violence and social inequality. It also contains the ambiguities of how internalised ritual violence can actually function to hold communities together. In this case, it is the binding spectacle of the derby event that provides social coherence. This community does not view the derby as the reality of their neoliberal conditioning, and on some unconscious level they do seem to enjoy the internalised violence.

**The Demo Drivers of Kaikohe**

The main focus of this documentary is Kaikohe: the place, its people and its iconic community event – the holiday-weekend derbies. Community involvement exemplifies their resilience to economic and social exclusion from the State. It is a curious form of resilience to analyse given that they all embody neoliberalist subjectivity. The main demo drivers featured in this film are employed as contractors for North Island Forest Investments Ltd. (NIFI), established in 1996. John Zielinski is the co-director of NIFI and he is also ‘the boss’ and financial sponsor of the demo drivers. He acts as their spokesperson, although it is Uncle Bimm who often speaks on behalf of the younger Māori demo drivers.

![Figure 12. Uncle Bimm and John Zielinski. *Kaikohe Demolition* (2004).](image)
John and Uncle Bimm often share the frame, and appear as friends on screen. For example, the composition of the above shot [see fig. 12] suggests egalitarianism between the men, but there is also something unequal about their relationship that warrants closer inspection. Though never explicitly articulated, this inequality presents itself through what is typically known as the unspoken rules of social engagement. John’s position of dominance is due to an entrenched and imposed ideology, naturalised to the point that it seems normal for him to take up the position of ‘boss’ or ‘spokesman’. As a neoliberal entrepreneur, he derives economic power from being the boss and from bankrolling the cars, which makes it possible for his employees to participate in the derby events. In one interview between the filmmaker and a young Māori driver, it is made known that John is paying for the demolition cars up front and then deducting the costs from the boys’ weekly pay. Though fraught with good intention, it puts the demo drivers into a cycle of debt, which then becomes a form of entrapment.

Membership of this group gives the boys a sense of identity and belonging, which is linked to their mythified view of the great rural way of life. Myth masks the reality that their ‘inclusion’ is negotiated under John’s domination. However, his Pākehā dominance is overlooked in the promotion of bicultural accord. John also has social dominance due to his position as ‘car manager’ and because he is known as the ‘Derby King’ – the winner of the ‘last car moving’ race category. The fact that he owns the cars (the means of destruction and production) and yet wins the race signifies a blatant conflict of interest that is also overlooked. John’s title affords him ‘mana’ (respect) among the Māori drivers; whereas Uncle Bimm has cultural mana because he is the Māori elder of the group. This connects with Avril Bell’s assertion that Pākehā culture is rather “thin” and difficult to articulate (4). It is not John’s cultural mana but rather his race and membership in the dominant socio-economic group that gives him status.

Throughout this film, establishing shots of Kaikohe’s rural landscape have been selected and inserted into the narration – a cinematic cue to spectators that emphasises the theme of landscape as central to the myth of Aotearoa New Zealand as rural Arcadia. In this case, mythical representation functions to portray nature as unconstructed reality. While these images connote an idyllic
existence within nature, I will explicate one specific scene in which myth collides with reality. It is a scene that I introduced in Chapter One, wherein John takes the filmmaker, his camera, and spectators on a voyeuristic journey into the impoverished backblocks of Kaikohe. Using Nichols’ terminology, there are three modes of documentary enacted in this scene: observational, participatory, and performative, each of which “emphasizes different cinematic resources or techniques” blended into a postmodern pastiche of documentary filmmaking in order to efface difference (Nichols 30). I also link this characteristic of documentary to the function of myth. In this scene, for example, documentary is enacting Western subjectivity as if naturalised and universal in order to efface racial difference. I will discuss how the modes function to achieve an ideological pastiche, which oversimplifies and romanticises the representation of Kaikohe.

The scene begins with a medium close-up of John directly addressing the spectator in the presence of an unseen camera and filmmaker (Habicht). John is driving his car while providing a commentary. This social interaction engages the participatory mode by means of “direct involvement from conversations” between John and Habicht and through the direct address to spectators (31), though it is John’s character mediating the double-layered interaction:

We’re just going for a bit of a tour around Kaikohe. Just to check out a couple of the demo men and see how they’re getting on. There’s a few sneaky characters around here, so I’ll just check them out.

The observational mode is functioning here through what Nichols describes as a “direct engagement with the everyday life of subjects as observed by an unobtrusive camera” (31). While the camera appears to be capturing unconstructed reality, the set-up is problematic in the way that the car offers a form of protection as the two Pākehā men drive around in an attempt to film the Other from a Western/Pākehā subject position. Although not foregrounded, John’s awareness of his position of dominance is expressed through his right of access to all these diverse people and places. Acting as an envoy, he has taken it
upon himself to lead Habicht and the spectator on a guided tour of a specific part of his town in order to exhibit how ‘the other bicultural half’ live. The film enacts the documentary desire to capture culture as objective reality. Moreover, in elevating vision over the other senses, this scene rearticulates Pākehā dominance through Western/Pākehā privilege. This permits John, Habicht, and the spectators to transcend cultural boundaries. It is a similar desire for cultural mastery of the Other that secures the comforts of Pākehā centrism, as described by Avril Bell and others. As I explained in Chapter One, in this scene the Other is constructed from the point of view of the ‘Pākehā Self’ in relation to the ‘Māori Other’. The voyeuristic journey thereby indulges the documentary desire to see and know the Other as it facilitates the comforts of Pākehā centrism.

Habicht is sitting in the front passenger seat with a digital camera capturing the action as they drive along a street. Observation modulates to the participatory mode as John points out Uncle Bimm’s house. “Oh yeah show us”, enthuses Habicht. His emphatic response promotes John’s active participation as well as his sense of authority to put the community on display. John pulls over to converse with a man on the street. He refers to him as “a young fella called, Ben” although Ben appears to be older than John. This description of Ben is thus more an expression of power relations and of John’s view of himself as ‘the leader’. In addressing Ben, John modulates his vocal register and his lexis to that of Māori slang. “Putting down a hangi, Cuz?” he asks, shifting how he presents himself in this new social interaction. Here, John’s interaction activates a moment of performativity. The performative mode of filmmaking, according to Nichols, “emphasizes the subjective or expressive aspect of the filmmaker’s own involvement with a subject” especially to evoke “emotional and social impact on an audience” (32). In this regard, Habicht’s high level of interest in the journey is prompting John’s performance in the face of a camera. Irving Goffmann states that people present themselves in everyday life in a manner different to a fictional performance.32 Nichols explains that a presentation of self in everyday life involves the manner in which a person expresses “personality, character, and individual traits” in everyday social situations (8-9). Nonetheless, John’s

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32 For further information see Erving Goffmann’s The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.
presentation of self is a performance. In presenting himself as the leader, John is performing his position of dominance within this social group. His performance is continuously changing and adapting in response to the presence of the camera, his interactions with the filmmaker, and with the people he encounters in the street. Nichols offers a useful explanation of this dynamic:

... [a] person does not present in exactly the same way to a companion on a date, a doctor in a hospital, his or her children at home, and a filmmaker in an interview. Nor do people continue to present the same way as an interaction develops; they modify their behaviour as the situation evolves (9).

The performative mode pretends less to objectivity and is more affective in the way it appeals to cinematic spectators. Consider how John responds to Habicht’s enthusiasm for this car journey, or how in response to Habicht’s laughter, he continues to make humorous remarks about the other vehicles in the street. For example, later in the scene he observes “half a trailer” and says, “you wouldn’t see that in Auckland, I don’t think.” Social repartee appeals to spectators’ sense of fun and adventure. It also appeals to class, race, and regional stereotypes. For example, the “half a trailer” comment operates as a class signifier. The comment also engages with a coded dominance as it offers a sense that John, Habicht, and the spectator by proxy, have got these people in the backblocks “sussed out”. John’s observation that “half a trailer” would be out of place in Auckland also expresses his sense of separation from the city. It is another reminder of the film’s rural location, though representation of rural life in this scene certainly does collide with Habicht’s selected and inserted images of rural Arcadia. In contrast to visions of a pastoral paradise, images of the backblocks of Kaikohe include rusted cars and houses in need of new paint. Therefore, his technique of inserting the sounds and images of ducks quacking and hot springs bubbling represents how he wants to speak about Kaikohe as Arcadia, and moreover, it satisfies the spectators’ desire to see and know rural Arcadia. Problematically, a false synthesis is accomplished for the spectator. In desiring to experience rural Arcadia on screen, the perception is that spectators can ‘have their cake and eat
it, too'. This means that the spectators, via the filmmaker, get to become voyeurs, and they also get to indulge in their desire see, know and consume rural Arcadia.

The ideological effect of the film is achieved through a pastiche of documentary modes. For example, the observational mode enables the desire to show land, as it is – a pretense to objective reality. However, the notion that we can just perceive reality conceals the fact of its socio-historical construction. The very act of making a documentary draws attention to this construction, yet also serves to conceal it. Digital cameras can go almost anywhere and this allows a new kind of participation, one that crosses into new territories and surpasses cultural boundaries. Accordingly, the subjects in this film perform their identities in the presence of a camera, as does the filmmaker. To make a documentary is to become part of what you are filming. Habicht is enabling the rural Arcadia myth in the way that he has chosen to speak about Kaikohe through its representation.

**Kaikohe Speedway**

The Kaikohe Speedway track is a contemporary site of violence built upon layerings of historical violence. Formed by volcanic aggression, the land is now occupied by a social group who embody a violent car culture. I argue that the track and its rural surrounds are the site of a nature/culture collision. Fiske points out that nature (land) signifies a “pre-cultural reality” whereas the track is a product of culture (44). Culture has been imposed on the land and applied to perceptions of it. I will discuss the meanings that circulate from both the land and a violent car culture.

Kaikohe Speedway is known locally as the ‘Place of Pace’, which indicates the speed at which one needs to move in order to stay in the race. This analogy extends to neoliberal resilience and the fast pace that individuals must move in order to be independent and to merely stay alive. The track is host to a series of holiday-weekend events, including the ‘Easter Stampede’ and the ‘Christmas Derby’. It is noteworthy that within this space of officially sanctioned violence, the demo drivers’ main form of recreation happens on holidays. Fiske points out that the etymology of ‘holiday’ as “Holy Day” links to bygone festivals and implies
“a time that is neither home nor work” (44). The attack on Santa during the 1991 Christmas Parade presents a further link between violence and the manner in which these subjects assert their identities on Holy Days of ‘re-creation’. What is also noteworthy is that the demolition event, as a form of recreational activity, is also the means for the ‘re-creation’ of the participants as neo-liberal subjects.

For the drivers, the track is a place to negotiate and re-create their identities. I claim that the demo drivers’ participation in a violent car culture is a way for them to “perform identities” and to negotiate the tensions of existing under neoliberalism in relation to their strong connection to this place (Nairn et al. 89).

The Kaikohe Speedway can be divided into two zones, which could be read as a parody of the geopolitical dynamics of ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’. In classic centre-periphery analysis, this theoretical model describes a structural relationship of dependency and isolation between the more advanced economic ‘centre’ and the less developed ‘periphery’ areas. For my analysis, I apply these descriptors to define the spatial zones that divide the social spectators in the ‘periphery’ zone and the aggressive competitors in the ‘centre’ destruction zone [see fig. 13]. The periphery is rural and where the spectators gather on green grass in a safe and social zone. A wire safety fence divides the community congregation from the fast and furious action on a brown dirt(y) track. The centre zone is industrial and
where all the collisions take place. In the centre, adrenaline-fuelled drivers aggressively compete for victory. Here, winning is less about skill and more about resilience and survival. The demo drivers’ specific car culture involves deliberately smashing up cars on a muddy dirt track, and then running them into the ground, in order to produce only one resilient winner. This could easily describe a parody of the expectations of the State towards the rural.

In “Reading the Beach”, Fiske describes the car as a “crucial cultural motif” (45). By this he means that cars act as an ornamental class signifier. Similarly, Barthes’ essay, “The New Citroën”, elaborates on the cultural and class myths attached to certain types of cars and their owners.33 As a class indicator, the cars in the demolition are old and dilapidated. Fiske also makes the distinction between cars as a class signifier the practice of individualising cars through custom car culture. The demo cars, just like the vans that Fiske describes, are disposable commodities, and they are also “mass produced and yet individualized” through art and identification (58). Individualisation is what differentiates them from the new vehicles purchased to express class standing. However, the customisation in fact compensates for their déclassé status. For example, many of John’s employees have ‘NIFI’ spray-painted on the body of their cars for their social identification. Other car labels connote youth and masculinity through such monikers as ‘Sheriff Stoner’ and ‘Deputy Dogg’, as well as the more crude and sexualised age-related signifiers of ‘pussy chaser’ and ‘virgin conversion’.

Through such resourceful resilience the demo drivers have primed their cars on a low budget by using unconventional techniques. In one pre-race scene, John instructs the younger men on how to remove a front windscreen by using just their feet. In another scene, John deepens the treads in his tyres with a chain saw. The winner is not judged on the make or model of their car. In a Demo Derby, the winner is the last sole survivor, or to use John’s words, “the last car moving.” As one driver declares, “I still want to be running at the end of the race.” In this sense, the demo drivers are performing their resilience through re-creation. In the centre zone they find their ‘self meaning’ through violent acts of resilience.

33 See Roland Barthes’ Mythologies for the essay “The New Citroën”.
The derby race category could be read as an allegory for the 'race to the bottom' often associated with globalisation and the down spiraling quest for cheaper labour. Governments do this by means of paying workers low wages and/or by reducing their living standards. Naomi Klein has identified that this type of global deregulation produces such a race by giving companies the ability to “cut and run” (6). On the demo track, cars also compete to reduce numbers. The cars race in harsh combative conditions until they are destroyed by the competition. In this regard, the race is a compressed allegory for neoliberalism. Furthermore, in global capitalist economies the production of goods is outsourced and moved to the next place where wages are low and conditions are poor. Kaikohe is just that kind of place. The demo drivers’ ‘race to the bottom’ is a race of resilience against the acts of violence that are performed on them within neoliberalism.

In Kaikohe, as in other rural areas of Aotearoa New Zealand, a car is a significant asset as it allows for greater “mobility and independence” (Nairn et al. 106). However, it is significant that the drivers do not use the cars to go somewhere else, such as to a job in another centre. Just like a neoliberal race to the bottom, they compete by driving around in circles until they die. For the demo drivers, it is their car culture that nevertheless defines their social interactions. Even if it takes them nowhere, the car gives the drivers “social capital” by enabling their membership in the group as well as involvement with all the rituals that go with customising old cars for race consumption (107). According to Fiske, such disposable art signifies “the appropriate form for an oppositional youth subculture” (59). For this reason, customising is inexpensive but requires their physical labour, which is the only resource they possess.34 Yet, it should not be forgotten that it is John who supplies the cars to the drivers in exchange for their labour. Ironically, even one’s own self-destruction must be bought on credit.

Ngāwhā Springs

*Kaikohe Demolition* begins with a projected black screen over which the sound of a woman performing a karanga (call) welcomes the spectators. Editing cuts to an establishing wide shot of what Jo Smith describes as one of Habicht’s “signature

34 For more on the function of style and customisation of vehicles, see Fiske’s “Reading the Beach”.
landscape shots of Northland” (7). In presenting the sights and sounds of rural Kaikohe, Habicht has selected a familiar rural mise-en-scène of land and water accompanied by the ambient sounds of ducks quacking and birds chirping. For urban spectators, these images equate to what Cowie describes as “mise-en-scènes of desire” that enable identification because the documentary image “asserts itself as real” (86) The sounds and images appear as denotative reality and yet the representation idealises nature, actively reproducing the rural Arcadia myth for a predominately urban audience. An electric guitar strum alerts the viewers to the presence of culture. Selected sounds and images now connect rustic buildings and bubbling water with the demo men as they enter into the frame. Their movement in the frame leads the viewers into the thermal pools at Ngāwhā Springs. This site of re-creation, which I label the ‘therapeutic zone’, functions as an antidote to the violence of the speedway track. In this zone, the men relax, re-create, and talk about rural life in general. However, this bucolic scene conceals the low socio-economic context of Kaikohe and its rural setting.

Traditionally, thermal hot springs are a site of therapeutic healing. The waters at Ngāwhā contain soda mercury, renowned as a curative treatment for skin and rheumatic disorders. Historically, the government bought land around Ngāwhā Springs in the late 19th century and developed pools for public use. At this site, culture has historically imposed boundaries upon nature. Economically, the thermal springs attract visitors to the area and are listed on various tourism websites. Even so, a luxury health spa it is not. The $4 entry fee reflects the very basic facilities. Showers are not provided and footwear is highly recommended. The rustic amenities reflect the larger issue of State neglect, as well as the low socio-economic context of this rural region. Semiotically, Ngāwhā Springs signifies different things to different people. For my analysis, I am interested in the meanings that are conferred upon this site of re-creation.

In water, a medium in which bodies connect and mingle, the men are calm and express a remarkable level of intimacy with Habicht through their interactions. Much of the film’s off-track commentary takes place in this therapeutic zone. In one of the hot pools, John reflects on the personal and social value of the springs:
Well look at the old hot springs here. Man, even got a roof over my head in this one. Blimmin’ good place to come out to and have a soak, after a hard day at the Kaikohe track... got the old mud pools here, mud bottoms... and they’re actually not too bad... So, we like to come out here and get all these lovely minerals into our skin.

John takes time to point out the roof over his head, exemplifying his gratitude for whatever meager infrastructure they still have. In this zone, the younger drivers talk about the importance of family, their Northern location, as well as the cleansing quality of the water (nature). “Better than a bath, mate,” says one of the boys. “It may look paru (dirty) but it’s lovely”, says another. The same could almost be said of what Botes describes as the “rough around the edges” demo drivers (1). It appears that the younger drivers are speaking in their own defense, at once aware of the camera and spectators. By one reading, the connotations of bathing in water may include the cleansing of the community and its muddied reputation for the 1991 attack on Santa. By another reading, bathing in water is a peaceful expression of their resilience. In this context, the drivers understand how spectators may perceive them as a bit “paru” but they wish to present themselves as pure and independent. This resonates with some of the broader paradoxes regarding a perceptual disconnect between how things appear and how things are. For example, this scene reminds us that the desire to see and the desire to know are complicated by the realities of everyday existence. The water may look dirty yet it is purifying for the demolition drivers. Thus, the desire to see and know rural life does not always sync with its reality.

The therapeutic zone of the springs is another site to which to apply the concept of myth to my analysis of the relationship between John and Uncle Bimm. At Ngāwhā Springs, John and Uncle Bimm share the same pool [see fig. 14] while the younger “boys” are positioned separately in a larger group [see fig. 15]. Their placement serves as recognition of the older men’s status, and as such, the division appears natural. The status of the two men is also reflected in the way that Habicht shoots the pool sequences. For example, he always balances the
composition and framing of John and Uncle Bimm within the same shot, which suggests a recognised equality between them.

In the hot pools, John frequently praises Uncle Bimm for his work ethic, loyalty, and competitive edge. However, Uncle Bimm differentiates between competing for success and participating for pleasure – subordinating winning to personal gratification. Consider the following dialogue, which portrays John as the one who values winning while Uncle Bimm values the simple pleasures of the event:

And I mean the thing with Uncle, he tells you he's gonna be there with a car and he's there. He turns up and the car's going, ya know, and ready to go. He's out there to win. I mean... that's the sort of fella he is. (John Zielinski)

To win and to enjoy, eh? To win and to enjoy. So far I haven't been winning. I've been enjoying it, eh? I really... I love the sport. Even if I come away with a hamburger, I'm happy, bro. How happy can a man be? (Uncle Bimm)

This conversation also reveals that the men have different motivations for their participation, yet at the same time the words and images reproduce a mythical
equality between them. However, when John is alone, another difference in their relationship is revealed. John talks more about his like of big cars, with big engines, and about winning big money: “I paid about two hundred and fifty dollars for it and it’s really made me about a thousand bucks, maybe a bit more.”

John is the man with the money who is after the prize money and the honour that comes with it. After all, he is the current ‘Derby King’ and, moreover, he knows how to use his own money, and his position of dominance, to make that win happen: “We’ve got a few hit men in our crew”, admits John. “Like Uncle Bimm. I can pay him ten bucks and say, take that guy out.” This serves as a reminder of John’s socio-economic position within this social group. Uncle Bimm is on John’s payroll, revealing that their relationship is a ‘bought’ one. Even ‘friendship’ has a price in rural Arcadia. I argue that John’s difference can be found in his adoption of the spirit of entrepreneurialism, which is at the core of neoliberal ideology.

For the young drivers, a different set of meanings circulates from the therapeutic zone. For them Ngāwhā Springs becomes a social space in which to perform identities through the simple act of ‘hanging out’. The work of Nairn et al. concludes that for young people, recreation (sporting, cultural, social) provides “important opportunities” to “re-create selves and connect with others” (108). All the participants in their youth study rated ‘hanging out’ with friends as one of their “main forms of re-creation”, which serves as a reminder of what Nairn et al. refer to as the “relational nature of identity” (108).35 In Kaikohe, both ‘a car’ and ‘a thermal hot pool’ provides a physical and social space for rural youth to re-create. A car is especially important in such rural areas where social opportunities are relatively limited. Car culture can include driving vehicles with revved up engines, listening to loud music and consuming alcohol, which Nairn et al. locate as “important symbols of masculinity” (106). For the demo ‘boys’, their particular car culture also includes all the preparation that will ultimately lead to vehicular destruction en masse. Crucially, for the violence to be contained in the event, the drivers must cleanse themselves outside of the track in the “better than a bath” thermal springs. This connects with Fiske’s nature/culture

35 For more information of this study, see Nairn et al.’s Children of Rogernomics: a Neoliberal Generation Leaves School.
dichotomy – social tensions must be played out in the track, and therefore, the polluted bodies must be cleansed in the purifying waters of rural Acadia.

At Ngāwhā Springs, the boys perform identities through their use of humour and bravado. As one of the drivers posits, “It’s all about having fun, and getting out there and showing them what you’ve got. And all the chicks that are watching, if they’re watching you. They’re watching me, yeah.” For the younger drivers, “showing them what you’ve got” is dependent on employment. In this regard, their performance of identity and masculinity is mortgaged to their boss.

![Figure 15 The Demo "Boys". Kaikohe Demolition (2004).](image)

The community aspect of the derby event draws the attention away from the socio-economic conditions that characterise and shape it. In this regard, this documentary representation of rural life in Kaikohe reproduces the rural Arcadia myth - it reveals the resilient aspect of rural violence, as it conceals the historical, neoliberal contexts that produced it. In one surprising hot pool exchange, a teenage driver references the importance of Northland’s people and place in relation to the events: “People just come up, take their families out for the day, families, eh? Good for the North.” His remark is followed by the insertion of one of Habicht’s signature rural landscapes, which lingers for several seconds, and is long enough for spectators to pick up on the cinematic linkage of land and identity. Jo Smith refers to this film as “cinema deeply embedded in the environment and the people of Kaikohe” (7). In this regard, the images of the rural landscape (spectacle), alongside the hot pool confessionals (knowledge),
satisfy the spectators’ desire to see and know rural life and rural people. Smith argues that these words and images also provide a “counterview of this lower socio-economic population” by focusing on the depiction of “community spirit” behind the event (5). Problematically, it engages the film in rural myth making, obscuring the reality of life on the poverty line for these citizens of rural Arcadia.

Figure 16. Ben’s Confessionals. Kaikohe Demolition (2004)

Ben Haretuku, a long-standing demo driver, “provides the most philosophical commentary” on why life in Aotearoa New Zealand (specifically life in Kaikohe) is so good, while also addressing the “negative connotations attached to the town” (Smith 8). Much of these confessions are themed around the perceived compensations for living in rural poverty. For example, Ben describes Kaikohe as “the centre of everything” and yet it is surrounded by the affluence of the Bay of Islands. He also talks about life on the poverty line with an air of acceptance: “It’s easier not to hope for too much. That way you’re never disappointed.” In this example, his rationalisation becomes a component of his rural resilience. He expresses self-reliance in the way that he does not depend on the State and, at the same time, articulates his complicity with the State’s neglect of Kaikohe. Ben is also quick to point out the simple pleasures to be gained from living in Kaikohe, such as competing in the demolition derbies: “It’s just, it’s just... I tell you it’s wonderful!” His initial discussion on car culture includes a description of his survival strategy: “As soon as someone goes smack and hits you, that’s it! My game plan flies out the window and I’m going ‘You Mongrel’ and I’m off after him”. This type of ‘fighting talk’ could be read as an allegory for battling against the effects of neoliberalism. If provoked, he will use violence to fight violence, a
historical strategy used by the community of Kaikohe. It seems fitting that Ben’s occupation involves taming violence. He identifies as a ‘doorman’, a title he prefers over ‘bouncer’:

Bouncers are these big burly guys that bully people. I don’t like those sort of connotations to me... I like to be called a doorman...
the art in being a good doorman is being able to see trouble brewing and quell it or remove it before it explodes.

Ben’s job involves suppressing violence. In view of that, he also facilitates anger management courses for men, “purely because I don’t believe that people deserve to be beaten up.” In this sense, Ben positions that it is okay to beat up cars, just not each other. Once more, for the violence to be contained in the event, a calming alternative must be made available outside of the track. Curiously, Ben’s philosophy is quite characteristic of neoliberal ideologies insofar as the problem that he identifies is not a system that perpetrates structural violence, but it is individual violence and the individual’s ability to control it. Ben is promoting the self-management of violence within the therapeutic zone of the purifying hot pools and within another zone of re-creation: the men’s group.

**The Sport, the State and Global Santa**

Ben is also the demo driver who retells the story of the 1991 attack on Santa. His perception is that the media only reports on “trouble” in Kaikohe, reinforcing stereotypes of both rural people and Māori. He insists that the township’s children and adults are not nasty people. A short scene in which a contemporary Santa is depicted walking on the beach and holding hands with the local smiling children immediately follows this confessional. They offer friendship rather than violence. The scene implies that past differences with this Globalising Other have been resolved, though it oversimplifies the historical issues and the larger socio-historical context that produced this form of pacified resilience within the children of Kaikohe. Indeed, it would seem that Habicht is desiring to present a counterview of the region’s long history of violence in privileging the depiction of a friendly community that also welcomes the Other. This counterview is followed
up in the final scene wherein Uncle Bimm competes in another competition – the annual lolly scramble at the Christmas Parade, wearing his MacDonald’s uniform. On the one hand, both Santa Claus and Ronald MacDonald are iconic examples of a Globalising Other, recognised around the world as ‘white men bearing gifts’. On the other hand, their negative impacts on local economies produce further acts of violence on vulnerable rural communities just like Kaikohe. Even so, the film’s uplifting ending implies that violence in this ‘rural Arcadia’ is now contained.

If Kaikohe Demolition depicts a problematic resolution with a Globalising Other, its depiction of bicultural relations reveals a further challenge to living in rural Arcadia. Though Habicht’s filmmaking style privileges the participatory mode, it becomes clear on several occasions that John mediates the collaboration between Habicht and the other demo drivers. In the following image [see fig. 17] John positions himself with the filmmaking crew in accordance with his position of dominance. Significantly, the other drivers (John’s employees) stand off to the side, as onlookers to the means of representation. The image thus depicts what Smith refers to as “a shared appreciation for machinery and technology” (5). Habicht has said in interviews, “we were just boys with our toys and so were the Kaikohe demo men!” (5) Yet the image also speaks about the relationship between the control over image production and the control over the event itself, the latter being negotiated by John’s money. Once again, everyday life in rural Arcadia has its economic and social costs.

Figure 17. Bicultural Collaboration. Kaikohe Demolition (2004)
Foreshore, Seabed, and Rural Communities in Aotearoa New Zealand

In this section, I examine the representation of claims to rural land and water, as articulated by *The Last Resort*. Contemporary debate over the ownership of the foreshore and seabed presents an additional socio-political context for my discussion. First, I explore how different cultural views of rural land and water collide and conflate in this film, revealing another fissure in the depiction of Aotearoa New Zealand as rural Arcadia. Second, I investigate the neoliberal context as it informs the identities of the film’s subjects. The juxtaposition between representations of rural Arcadia and the reality of the neoliberal context is the common denominator for my analysis of both films. For *Kaikohe Demolition*, I have discussed the subjects’ expressions of resilience and violence in the face of State-imposed economic and social reform. With *The Last Resort*, I take my analysis of neoliberalism in a new direction to investigate the interrelated issues of desirability, access and ownership of rural land and water.

Marketing Aotearoa New Zealand as rural Arcadia has attracted global interest since the first Western settlements. However, the State’s adoption of neoliberal policies opened up the nation to foreign ownership as it abandoned its rural investments. *The Last Resort* picks up on the social anxieties over State divestment in the rural as well as the cultural trauma underpinning the on sale of State assets to overseas investment. This film also presents an opportunity to examine the issues of unsettled biculturalism, which contributes to a sense of displacement from land and identity. I claim the film’s ambivalence towards biculturalism presents a false synthesis between the Māori and Pākehā subjects within the film, as they redirect their anger at a constructed Globalising Other.

Abi King-Jones and Errol Wright, the filmmakers of *The Last Resort*, state in the DVD commentary that their aim is to investigate the intersection between Māori and Pākehā relations and foreign investment. The context for their investigation is rural land sales in Aotearoa New Zealand. This film asks questions about who has control over the land, and who does not. The foreshore and seabed controversy is foregrounded, and the film includes recordings of interviews and public and political debates on the issue, highlighting the tensions of access and
ownership. At the film’s heart is the representation of the relationship that locals and visitors have with a coastal campground at Opoutama, rural Hawkes Bay.

The film documents a myriad of emotional and cultural responses to the closure of the campsite to make way for a multi-million dollar residential subdivision for wealthy elites. In a series of participatory interviews edited into the narration, several Māori residents reflect on the healing nature of the environment, while the holiday campers discuss their desire to escape city life and engage with the therapeutic pleasures of communal living. Their desires reflect those of the early European settlers who came to Aotearoa New Zealand in search of the great rural way of life. The film’s representation of a desire for rural land and water positions Opoutama as a rural Arcadia. Furthermore, it promotes the founding ideal (or myth) that this rural Arcadia should be accessible to all its citizens. This rural myth advances a harmonious vision of Māori and Pākehā unification at the same time that it obscures the issues that produce bicultural disharmony. Before I elaborate on the representations in this film it is necessary to provide some context for the different claims to rural land and water in Aotearoa New Zealand.

**Customary Rights verses Common Law Rights: a Clash of Cultures**

Māori and Pākehā citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand hold different sets of cultural beliefs, as well as historical assumptions, about rights to the foreshore and seabed. Māori assume customary rights based on a long history of cultural and spiritual connections. By contrast, Pakeha assume common law rights based on connections with the Crown. I will discuss each of these assumptions in turn. As Mark Hickford points out, for a long time Māori had used the foreshore and seabed for collecting seafood [see fig. 18 and 19], and for the “landing of canoes, recreation, as battlegrounds, [and] burial grounds” (2). Several Māori subjects within The Last Resort discuss their relationship with land and water. For example, Rakiihia Tau states, “the land identifies your heritage and where you come from. It gives you your right to stand. And if you sell your land then you sell your heritage and the right to speak.” Māori cultural relations are defined by whakapapa (genealogy). Jacinta Ruru explains the matriarchal quality of this relationship, “land and water is one entity: our earth mother” (58). Abby Suszko
suggests that this unity creates a sense of responsibility to nature and an onus for “kaitiakitanga” (guardianship) (v). In *The Last Resort*, Māori subjects express their “kaitiakitanga duties” as they protest the sale of their land at Opoutama (v).

![Figure 18. Brees, Samuel Charles. Māori by Porirua Harbour. 1842.](image1)

![Figure 19. Fox, Samuel. Māori in the Kaipara.1864.](image2)

Pākehā assume that Crown ownership provided the public with common law rights to the foreshore and seabed. English common law recognises the Crown as the “original owner” of the foreshore and seabed (Hickford 1). This common law was introduced with the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. For Pākehā, some of their earliest interactions with the sea and coastline involved transportation [see fig. 20]. Hickford states that the foreshore was viewed as a public site for "exchange and carriage" (2). In keeping with Victorian ideals, the beach was viewed as a public site of recreation [see fig. 21]. Beach culture developed as early townships
were progressively urbanised, which provides a further rationale for “the belief that the foreshore was public space” (3). Phillips suggests that the “Easy and free access to the beach has been seen as a national birthright” (5). Certainly, the Pākehā campers in The Last Resort consider it as the place to go for a holiday.

Hickford proposes that the assumption of Crown ownership “overlooked the place of Māori customary interests in the foreshore and seabed” (2). As the following satirical cartoon points out [see fig. 22], the widely held belief that the ‘Queen’s Chain’ provides “a universal right of public access” to the edge of waterways and coasts is a myth (Hickford 3). The fact that approximately 30% of the coastline of Aotearoa New Zealand is privately owned dispels this myth. Here reality collides with an even more complex myth: the claims to ownership

36 The ‘Queen’s Chain’ describes a 20-metre strip along the edge of waterways and coastlines. Though Queen Victoria requested that sites be reserved for public recreation it was never legally sanctioned.
of what is essentially confiscated and/or stolen land [see fig. 23]. The cultural beliefs and historical assumptions that I have outlined present as themes for analysis. Although the film provides a history of the site of Opoutama, the representation appeals to the myth of a happy communal existence in Arcadia. Furthermore, the film conflates the different cultural beliefs and historical assumptions discussed above. My analysis indicates that as Māori and Pākehā unite through their political interaction, the film overlooks difference as well as an acceptance of ‘other’. I claim the film subordinates what Cowie describes as “the desire for reality” as knowledge in favour of satisfying the desire to see the spectacle of Aotearoa New Zealand as a rural Arcadia for its predominantly urban audience (1). In this manner, the film supports the citizen-spectator’s desire for the cinematic ‘ruralisation’ of a highly urbanised and modern nation.

Figure 22. Tremain, Garrick. The Queen’s Chain. 1990.

Figure 23. Scott, Tom. The Foreshore and Seabed Act

Customary Rights vs. Common Law Rights
The Foreshore and Seabed Act 2004

The Foreshore and Seabed Act 2004 arose out of, and further ignited, public and political debate over unsettled Treaty claims. This Act of Parliament, which has since been repealed, effectively gave full legal and beneficial ownership of the public foreshore and seabed to the Crown. Hickford defines the seabed as "land that is completely submerged under water", whereas the foreshore refers to "land that is regularly submerged beneath the sea’s tidal ebb and flow" (1).37 Historical claims to the foreshore and seabed came into sharp focus in the early millennium as Prime Minister Helen Clark announced that the Government would legislate to ensure public access to, and State ownership of, the foreshore and seabed. Much of the mainstream media representation of this controversy focused on issues of public access and different claims to ownership. In The Last Resort, several subjects also raise their concern that future governments could potentially sell or privatise the foreshore and seabed, a hypothesis of history repeating the neoliberal reforms of 1984. As detailed in my introduction, from 1984 onwards the Government’s rollout of economic reforms included the privatisation of a selection of State assets. In The Last Resort, the perception that global corporations will take over the control of the nation’s assets intensifies as the film constructs a Globalising Other in the form of foreign investors, even though they do not ever materialise in rural Opoutama. In the analysis that follows, I also explore the paradoxes in the film’s positioning of foreign investors as the key threat to living in rural Arcadia given the fact that the sale of rural land has been driven by neoliberal policies within New Zealand.

The Last Resort and the Rural Arcadia Myth

The tensions embedded in this documentary relate to a clash of cultures, as well as a clash of desires. First, there is the collision of Māori and Pākehā cultural perceptions and claims to the land and water. In The Last Resort, these perceptions include views of the foreshore and seabed expressed through the filmmakers’ use of participatory interviews. Jay Ruby regards the practice of including interviews within the film’s narration as crucial to maintaining documentary authenticity. He describes this technique as “speaking with’

37 For further information see: http://www.beehive.govt.nz/foreshore/home.cfm
instead of ‘speaking for” (54). In The Last Resort, Pākehā express their desire for nature as well as their sense of nostalgia towards traditional communal camping holidays. Māori explain how genealogy and human relationships are integral to the environment. In this manner, Māori and Pākehā subjects “speak with” both the filmmakers and the spectators (54). I suggest that the selection, ordering and editing of interviews and images serve to foreground cultural ‘commonalities’ rather than acknowledge the importance of cultural ‘differences’. Through this editing technique, divergent cultural views collide and then merge, presenting a false synthesis for film spectators. At the same time, the film masks the historical conditions that have produced cultural contention over claims to land and water. This contention links with Turner’s description of “contemporary unsettlement”, which he suggests is the settler desire to forget “the trauma and dislocation” of settlement (20). In the historical context of the settlement of Aotearoa New Zealand, this took the form land confiscation through colonisation. I extend Turner’s concept to suggest that ongoing contention with Treaty claims and confusion with biculturalism has produced an unsettling sense of displacement from land and identity, whereby New Zealanders can never quite feel at home.

Second, at the site of Opoutama I claim that there is clash of three desires: the ‘Kiwi’ desire for rural land ownership, the neoliberal desire for capitalist land development, and the desire that Māori have to reclaim their customary rights. Following Phillips, I have described the “Kiwi Dream” as the dream of the great rural way of life, and moreover, the desire to own a piece of coastal or pastoral paradise (5).

This desire for land ownership collides with the neoliberal desire for capitalist land development. This neoliberal desire describes the commodification of land for the purposes of capital accumulation. For my discussion, I connect the neoliberal desire with what Harvey describes as a project to achieve the “restoration of class power” through capital accumulation (16). As I have ascertained, accumulation of capital is always for some Other an accumulation by dispossession. In The Last Resort, this connects with the loss of access and/or ownership of land and water in Opoutama as it is sold to overseas investors. Questions over who owns this land collide with the desires of local
Māori to reclaim their customary rights. Mason Durie offers this Māori perspective on the importance of the foreshore and seabed:

> The foreshore is a gateway to the bounty of the sea, a playground for countless land dwellers, a source of food and wealth, and a site where local knowledge, tradition, and custom have evolved over the centuries (83).

My analysis elaborates the clash of cultures and desires that converge on the site of Opoutama, which informs the wider debates pertaining to the foreshore and seabed, as well as to the land and identities of Aotearoa New Zealand citizens.

![Figure 24. The Last Resort (2006) DVD Slip Cover](image)

**Opoutama: “Centre of the Universe”**

The clash of cultures in rural Opoutama is signaled from the film’s opening images. It begins with an image of a map of Aotearoa New Zealand over which a series of sound bites express a range of cultural opinions on such issues as unsettled Treaty claims, the sale of State assets, and the danger of foreign investment [see fig. 24]. A series of individual piece to camera interviews follow the sound bites, which develops the theme of ‘land ownership’ in Aotearoa New Zealand. The interviewees range from a successful Ngāi Tahu claimant, a
selection of State asset and environmental interest groups, to local residents and campers at Opoutama. However, the editing of the interviews, into a sustained montage sequence, promotes the appearance of bicultural commonalities on the unified theme of land and identity in Aotearoa New Zealand. The interviews form a chorus, echoing an overarching sense of displacement from the land as well as from traditional rural or coastal lifestyles. Even so, different cultural rationales are offered to explain this shared sense of anger and loss. Māori subjects express anger over unresolved Treaty issues. For example, Rakiihia Tau recalls a history lesson in which a “European historian” explained the Treaty of Waitangi to him by listing the three Articles and then concluding, “We have much to be ashamed about. The less said about it the better.” The desire not to know, as personified by the “European historian”, exemplifies an enforced historical amnesia in settlers and connects with Turner’s description of “contemporary unsettlement” (20). The theme of ‘ignoring’ settlement, and the Pākehā settlers’ repression of guilt, engages with Avril Bell’s argument that Pākehā dominance allows for the social and cultural forgetting of the fact that European migration “took the form of colonising settlement” (9). The desire not to know is also taken up by both the filmmakers of The Last Resort, who neglect to acknowledge their own political ancestry even as they merge cultural claims to land within the film’s narration.

In another interview, Opoutama resident, Ngaromoana Raueti-Tomoana expresses her resentment towards the developer who she claims is “going to turn our front garden into a multi-million dollar residential spot for really rich people”. Her reference to the wealthy elite expresses Ngaromoana’s sense of social and economic exclusion, which also describes a condition of neoliberalism that is especially relevant to both rural residents and Māori. As I have explained, the economic liberalisation of the 1980s included the sale of State assets as well as the deregulation of State control over land and water. Rural residents were left vulnerable to the economic and social costs of such measures. Cultural consequences were measured by the intensification of internalised hostility over unresolved Treaty claims. Pākehā subjects also express anger for the loss of control of State assets but for different cultural reasons. For example, Murray
Horton, a campaigner for the internal control of State assets, voices frustration at the neoliberal context that produced, what he describes as an asset “takeover”:

We have one of the most completely liberalised regimes for foreign investment in the world. And I would always put the term “investment” in inverted commas… it’s not investment at all. The vast majority of it is purely and simply a takeover.

Murray’s comment refers to two points of contention raised in *The Last Resort*. First, he is resurfacing the neoliberal reforms that opened up Aotearoa New Zealand to foreign investment. Second, he is fuelling the perception that global capitalists are “taking over” to advance their own accumulation of wealth.

In another interview, Kevin Cullen, a regular camper at Opoutama for nearly forty years, observes that the traditional ‘Kiwi summer holiday’ is now a part of Kiwi cultural history: “Camping as we know it is gone. It’s dead. It’s had it. It’s not had it, it’s just the way things are going… a thing of the past.” Cullen articulates the loss of the Pākehā “Kiwi Dream” (Phillips 5). His own sense of loss refers to his imaginings of ‘Paradise lost’, and moreover, the loss of access to the beach, which Phillips describes as a perceived “national birthright” (5). Here the film engages with myth making as it positions this land, which was stolen from Māori under colonisation, as the birthright of all its citizens. Cullen also states that the campsite is listed in the Lonely Planet travel guide, which attracts global visitors to the area. The promotion New Zealand as a rural Arcadia has proved a double-edge sword: attracting the tourist dollar on which many local economies depend, as well as the undesirable global property speculators who buy up coastal land.

The interviews highlight a range of opinions through two distinct cultural perspectives: Māori and Pākehā. It is noteworthy that the issues raised are not issues with ‘each other’ (the Bicultural Other) they are issues with a third Other, personified by foreign investors.
**Rural Arcadia Through Montage**

Immediately following the introductory interviews, a montage of location shots of land and sea, campers and surfers, reinforce the themes of land and identity. The montage appears to capture the reality of happy communal camping in Opoutama. However, it is important to be mindful of the difference between reality and representation. As Cowie reminds us, the “selection and ordering of images and sounds of reality constitute an account of the world” but this also means that documentary “becomes prey to a loss of the real in its narratives of reality” (1). I will explicate this dynamic through my analysis of this montage. The shots also include two Māori performers on stage singing about ‘paradise’:

On the Whangawehi river  
where I left my heart one day  
In that sleepy Opoutama village  
where the folks are young and gay.  
Hey, they call it Mahia.  
It’s a place that will survive.  
And I don’t care what they call it  
but to me it’s paradise.

The filmmakers’ selection and ordering of images and sounds of reality for this montage represents Opoutama as ‘Paradise’ or as rural Arcadia. To engage Barthes’ concept of myth, the words and images connote a harmonious existence within nature and with each other. Furthermore, the landscapes and seascapes operate on a denotative level to imply that this Arcadia is accessible to everyone. Certainly the montage of shots includes Māori and Pākehā subjects happily taking part in communal activities within each frame. However, Māori and Pākehā do not ever seem to appear together within the same frame. Something is being represented that is not being spoken about in relation to the terms and conditions of living together in Paradise. Cowie suggests that with documentary, spectators are subjected to “an extraction from and organization of reality” (2). Concealed within the frames of this montage sequence are the “historical and social determinations of the social reality re-presented” (1). Hence, there is a
disconnection between what this film depicts and what it represents. The film is editing images of reality into the narrative in order to represent commonalities and to erase differences. The montage has the added mythological aspect in that the shots reveal bicultural harmony as they exclude bicultural disconnect.

**Narratives of Nostalgia, Representations of Desire**

In this section I discuss how nostalgia and desire engage with rural myth making. The narration continues by means of separate interviews with Pākehā campers and Māori residents of Opoutama. As campers discuss their family holidays, spectators learn that many have returned to the campsite for several decades. Some campers also list several generations of family members who have taken their holidays together at this site. This demonstrates a sense of entitlement and a perceived birthright of access to this land. The interviews privilege the participatory mode of documentary filmmaking. Nichols suggests that the interactive aspect of this mode offers a “distinctive window onto a portion of our world” and this is achieved through the collaboration between filmmaker and subject (180). Although the filmmakers’ are unseen for most of this film, their off-camera behaviour prompts the subjects’ candid and emotional responses. For instance, returnee campers Brian and Fiona Hammond discuss the “spiritual feel” of the site and become emotional as they explain to the filmmakers how the area helped Fiona to heal from an illness.

As Brian and Fiona recount the joys of camping, the scene cuts to a montage of Super 8 footage of another family’s annual holidays at Opoutama from 1981 to 1991. It is noteworthy that one family’s footage is held as iconic of ‘every family’, as if exemplary of ‘the way it was’ for all. The montage thereby converges with myth making by once more representing a particular romanticised view of life as if it were universal. Both the content of the interviews and the home movie aesthetic invoke a sense of nostalgia for past holidays that cannot be repeated. Here, the camera functions as a lens looking back on the past (nostalgically), before it turns towards the future of a ‘Paradise Lost’. The images and sounds capture and reproduce a combination of nostalgia, loss, and trauma. Here, nostalgia performs a conservative function in the way that it privileges the
dominant cultural viewpoint of the land. In this scene, Pākehā perspectives of this environment privilege a loss of access to “The Kiwi Dream” (Phillips 5).

The participatory interviews also engage with camper Michelle Boag as she describes her desire for, and enjoyment of, unpretentious communal living:

There’s no fences. There’s no hedges. Nobody’s out mowing their little patch of lawn... You’ve all gotta go over there to go to the toilet together. And people all mix and mingle over at the cook house. You all just muck in together here... with people of all walks of life.

Here the representation of the campsite once more engages with the desire for a rural Arcadia in which everyone lives and works together in harmony. In the DVD’s commentary, filmmaker Abi King-Jones states that she wanted to show how people connect with the land, and to show similarities with Pākehā culture and the relationship that the tangata whenua (people of the land) have with the land. King-Jones claims that communal temporary living was how Early European clan-based societies and Early Māori tribal-based societies once lived. However, just like in Opoutama, these different cultural groups lived separately from each other. Once more, the film simultaneously connects and separates Māori and Pākehā, in terms of presenting similarities but in separate frames.

**Land Confiscation, Eviction and Occupation: Rural Arcadia in Crisis?**

In this section I discuss how Opoutama has different meanings for different groups of people. However, Māori and Pākehā are portrayed as united through their political interaction as rural Arcadia goes up for sale. Local Māori resident Ngaromoana Raureti-Tomoana describes Opoutama as her “universe”, which she later defends through her occupation and by exercising her kaitiakitanga:

This place feeds us, heals us. Our children have a beautiful environment. We move at a pace, a nice pace that works with...
well, I could say it was the environment but the environment, just like the people, are just overwhelmed by change.

Ngaromoana identifies with the environment as a life-giving force. The “change” she refers to takes the form of the purchase and development of this site at the hands of a group of investors. As the campers are moved out, the developer and his team move in. The planned sub-division represents the neoliberal desire for capitalist land development. For example, as the trees are felled, spectators witness the entrepreneurial transformation whereby a tree does not accrue any economic value until someone cuts it down. In a series of participatory interviews, local residents voice their shared concerns. Australian expat Max Bryant stages a ‘protest against progress’ to try to draw attention to residents’ ‘lack of control’ over the pace of development [see fig. 25]. Kevin Cullen asserts the campsite should have not been sold to a “private concern”. He then adds, “Most of them [campsites] are being bought up by overseas concerns, “Ya know rich Americans and all this sort of carry on... bad news.” The response to the development thus produces what could be described as a reactionary solidarity between some local Māori and Pākehā residents and campers, as they protest against an imagined Globalising Other, constructed by the film. This form of solidarity elicits spectator identification on the basis of ‘rurality’. In Mythologies, Barthes positions the Other as “a scandal that threatens” identity (151). The film constructs a rural sense of self, or rurality, in a binary relationship with a Globalising Other. The scandal to which Barthes refers is here manifested in the representation of ruralisation. The film thus supports the citizen-spectator desire for the representation of ‘ruralisation’ as a form of compensation for the reality that Aotearoa New Zealand is a highly urbanised and developed nation.
There is an irony to all the protest. While Māori and Pākehā express animosity towards a Globalising Other, it is in fact other Aotearoa New Zealand citizens who are speculating on the land. The developer of the sub-division is a New Zealander, acting on behalf of other capitalist investors who are also New Zealanders. However, the representation of reactionary solidarity is directed at imagined foreign investors or those “rich Americans”. Directing their hostility at the Globalising Other once more shifts the focus away from the unsettled intranational issues within biculturalism. The debate over the sale of Opoutama’s Blue Bay campsite in 2005 skips over the fact that some of this land was originally acquired by the Crown, through a questionable process, for the allocation of the campsite. As a result, there is a Treaty claim on the land, which at the time of filming was due to be heard by the Waitangi Tribunal in 2010. Local iwi still wish to have their claim heard in court, and moreover, they desire to have their customary rights acknowledged. However, the representation of what one Māori protestor refers to as a ‘21st Century land confiscation’ identifies with the nationalised debate over claims to the foreshore and seabed.

Abby Suszko’s research into media representation of the foreshore and seabed debate revealed that Māori feared that the controversy would damage the progress that had been made in regard to race relations within Aotearoa New Zealand. She refers to the work of Sykes et al. to support this claim:
In an era where recognition is being given to the serious impacts of unjust confiscations carried out by the crown and the entrenchment of poverty that this caused within Māoridom, it is repugnant to consider that this is a cycle that the crown are unwilling to break (qtd. in Suszko 31).

The very limited representation of bicultural interaction within the film conceals a lack of ‘progress’ with bicultural relations in Aotearoa New Zealand, which is then displaced onto a Globalising Other who threatens national identity. The over-emphasis on international conflict with foreign investment thus serves to mask the under-exploration of the history of bicultural tensions. Reproduction of the harmonious bicultural myth produces a reactionary solidarity, which offers a false synthesis for spectators. The Globalising Other can also be read as a threat to the myth of rural Arcadia - neither of which exists in the manner that they are represented. In this regard, the documentary representation of rural land sales is a collision of cultures and dreams, as well as a clash of myth and reality.

Conclusion: Reflections on Rural Arcadia

In this chapter, I have discussed the documentary representation of the rural Arcadia myth, within the context of neoliberalism, the foreshore and seabed debate, and the associated issues with claims to rural land and water. Rural Arcadia depicts a place of rural harmony and communal contentment. I have argued that idealised depictions of rural life nourish the citizen-spectators’ desire to experience Aotearoa New Zealand as rural Arcadia. As my analysis reveals, rural representation does not reflect the reality of rural life in modern Aotearoa New Zealand. In Kaikohe Demolition, representation of the subjects’ community spirit and ‘rural resilience’ serves to suppress the reality of rural violence, economic exclusion and social inequality. The Last Resort reveals the complex negotiations that rural land and water are subject to, as well as the different cultural, social and economic conditions that produce conflicts over its access and ownership. Representation of ‘cultural commonality’ as well as the film subjects’ nostalgia and desire for rural living serves to obscure these issues.
CHAPTER THREE: Taming Nature, Globalisation and the Globalising Other

In this chapter, I will discuss *This Way of Life* (2009) and *Land of the Long White Cloud* (2009), examining the way each film reproduces the taming nature myth, which I have described as one sub-myth of the great rural way of life. I argue that the taming nature myth promotes the human control of nature for two interrelated objectives: the productivity and the purity of rural people and place.

In contrast to depictions of a domesticated and serene rural Arcadia, the taming nature myth, as Bell describes it, connotes "the frontier-style slash-and-burn way of taming nature, requiring heroic physical prowess" (147). This myth also operates through a duality of violence – a taming of the 'Self' and a taming of the wilderness, each of which stands in an uneasy relationship with the other. The paradox of this myth is that settlers’ enacted violence on the land in order to feel morally pure as a people. In the period of colonial settlement, the taming nature myth implied a relation between “a strong work ethic” and “a moral wholesomeness”, both of which appeared to be absent in 19th century urban areas (147). Such views of rural life, as described by Bell, operate through a Barthesian mythical structure. Bell explains how early settler agents promoted Aotearoa New Zealand as “a chance to own one’s own land, be one’s own boss” and “tame the wilderness into productive land” by means of hard “honest toil” (145-147). Excluded from these depictions were the realities of violence, racial conflict, “social class issues” and, moreover, Māori occupation and subsequent “land disputes” (147). I claim that these mythical views of rural life still persist, and are preserved, within the worlds of my films.

The taming nature myth has historical motivations articulated in the processes of colonial settlement and it continues to underpin rural identities in modern Aotearoa New Zealand. Samuel and Thompson explain how identifying the “mythical elements” in one’s culture helps to discern “the active relationship between the past and the present” as well as recognise “the power of myth and unconscious desire as forces” that structure present lives (5). In colonial settlement, the euro-centric taming nature myth represented Aotearoa New
Zealand as a wide-open frontier, free to be cultivated into a “bountiful Eden” (147). Settler propaganda also specified that only citizens of a strong moral character with a robust work ethic would inhabit the new nation (147). For example, Wakefield’s plan for building the ideal rural-based society is embedded within these significations. The connotations of “a chance to own one’s own land, be one's own boss, and tame the wilderness into productive land” appeared at the denotative level of meaning – as a literal opportunity for all potential settlers (145). The dominant ideology embedded in this message was specifically targeted at the landless labouring classes, and suggested to them: “if you just work hard enough, you, too, can be your own boss and own your own land.” This type of ideology is maintained and transformed within neoliberalism. As we shall see in my upcoming analysis of This Way of Life, its central subject, Peter Karena, personifies the neoliberal work ethic as he creatively reinvents himself as a self-employed entrepreneur. In doing so, he becomes a ‘neoliberal rural self’. This means that on the one hand, he personifies creativity with sourcing employment; on the other hand, it demonstrates his own complicity with an unstable global economy that has forced him to become self-reliant.

Bell claims that the characterisation of the early pioneers as the “happy rural family working together in the natural environment” became central to the development of a rural culture in Aotearoa New Zealand. The taming nature myth reconstructs a comparable rural ethos that permeates both of my films. Furthermore, as it is primarily an urban audience that consumes these films, the sight of ‘happy rural families taming the wilderness’ satisfies the spectators’ desire to see and know this particular view of rural life onscreen. The films’ representation of rural life offers what Cowie describes as “mise-en-scènes of desire and imaginings that enable identification” precisely because the documentary image “asserts itself as real” (86) The reproduction of the taming nature myth thereby pretends to be an expression of real life and this can compel spectators to accept their myths as natural and then construct a view of themselves in relation to the myth. As an example, I argue that This Way of Life satisfies the desires of urban spectators to see and know rural life by perpetuating the longstanding nationalised dream of leaving the city behind to
take up an idealised rural lifestyle. For example, in a scene that tracks Peter while he is hunting, the images of him carrying a wild deer on his back connote a level of physical prowess akin to depictions of the pioneering male settler [see fig. 26]. He informs the filmmaker that the hard physical work of the hunt makes him feel “pure” and, moreover, it allows him to sustain his family and maintain his independence from the city:

I could spend a day at the freezing works killing cattle and working, and not working really hard, not working myself into a sweat, and earn enough that day to maybe buy half a side of venison, half a deer, and there’s no satisfaction in it. Here I work hard and I’ll be sweating. I might shoot a deer down in some gully and I’ve got to carry it up and there’ll be times when I’ll just be sitting there thinking “I don’t know if I can go any further with this thing on my back” … It’s a lot more work but it makes me feel good, it makes me feel healthy.

Figure 26. Peter and the Wild Deer. The Way of Life (2009).

As my forthcoming analysis will show, Peter’s desire for a self-sufficient rural life is also a desire to be free from the city, which he views as unsatisfying. Peter’s desires are comparable to those of the pioneering settlers. As Bell suggests, “People migrated across the world for a way of life that eluded them in industrial
revolutionary Britain” (145). Aotearoa New Zealand was marketed as an authentic and healthier way of life. This is also how Peter views his own rural life. It is in this manner that the film’s representation of Peter’s way of life offers a form of recompense for its primarily urban-based audience, and for all that eludes them in their busy city lives.

Not only do the rural subjects within both of my films desire to dissociate themselves from the perils of urbanisation, they also desire to be free from what they perceive as the controlling effects of globalisation. In my discussion, I draw upon Fredric Jameson’s definition of globalisation as “a set of processes” by which “the technological, the political, the cultural, the economic and the social” elements all combine to produce its totality (49). I discuss these elements of globalisation as they emerge through the conversations between the filmmakers and their subjects. For example, in response to their views on global change, many of the subjects within both films assume the taming nature myth and its connotations of self-sufficiency and independence when they stake protective claims to their piece of coastal or pastoral paradise. A case in point is in Land of the Long White Cloud when a young Māori fishing contestant advocates for ecofriendly self-sufficiency as a way to disconnect from what he describes as “obsolete” global technologies. Heather, a local Māori resident, also endorses localised self-sufficiency when she states that one of the best things about living in Kaitaia is the supply of food for those who are willing to fish and/or hunt it for themselves. While the pioneers perceived their new environment as a wide-open resource, these Northland subjects express a desire to utilise and protect their local resources. To summarise, the European settlement of Aotearoa New Zealand was expansive, while within the films’ representation, the rural re-settlement of Aotearoa New Zealand is implosive.

Through participatory interviews, the films’ subjects display a strong sense of rural identification or ‘rurality’ and assert various forms of rural resilience to their situation. As I have stipulated, I use the term ‘rural resilience’ to describe the ways in which rural subjects respond to neoliberal conditions. I claim that the deployment of neoliberal ideologies, for example the advancement of urban
growth at the expense of rural decline, put these rural residents in a situation of having little choice than to be creatively self-reliant so as to reduce their vulnerabilities; though, in so doing they also express complicity with the neoliberal ideologies that left them vulnerable. I argue that rural resilience thereby operates through a duality of self-reliance and complicity within the current neoliberal political model. The cruel contradiction for rural subjects is that they have become resilient to a State system that forced them into resilience, which they then take up as the reassertion of their rurality. Within this paradox, they have reinvented themselves as ‘neoliberal rural selves’.

I set up my examination of the taming nature myth with a contextual discussion of two widely perceived threats to the sustainability of a certain rural way of life in Aotearoa New Zealand. First, for my analysis of sequences from This Way of Life, I discuss the subjects’ views of globalisation in dialogue with how they assert their rural resilience. For example, Peter Karena upholds a strong belief that nature will provide for him and his family; though his wife, Colleen, is more doubtful in her view that global change may no longer permit them to sustain their way of life. Second, I analyse scenes from Land of the Long White Cloud with a focus on the subjects’ perceptions of the Globalising Other in dialogue with their affirmations of rural resilience. Both Māori and Pākehā fishing contestants, who identify themselves as local residents or visitors from the city, express different views of globalisation while battling the wild elements at Ninety Mile Beach. I argue that the alleged threat of the Globalising Other has re-ignited assertions of rural resilience whereby the subjects of these films maintain a belief in the great rural way of life.
This Way of Life (2009)

Filmed on location in rural Hawkes Bay, and shot over four years, This Way of Life is an intimate portrait of Peter Karena, his family, and their rural way of life. Born in Australia, Peter was adopted into a Māori family in childhood and resettled in Aotearoa New Zealand. Now in his 30s, he is a horse wrangler, hunter, husband of Colleen (who is also Māori), and father of six children. The film’s representation of Peter focuses on his strong connection to nature. He is guided by a moral code of conduct that operates in close harmony with his rural environment. I claim that Peter personifies the taming nature myth and its connotations associated with the transformative power of land and labour. Peter believes that he can uphold his moral integrity and provide for his family by taming the land and his horses into productivity. Faced with a series of unsettling challenges, including estrangement from his stepfather, Peter refuses to break his bond with nature (land, horses) and maintains a romantic belief in rural self-sufficiency in order to remain free from the city. Maintaining this myth suppresses the reality of his financial hardship and his conflicting views of land and land ownership. Though Peter wrestles with capitalist notions of land ownership, eventually he concedes that a new way of life, one more consistent with capitalism, is necessary for him, his family, and their future survival. The film’s themes of rurality and rural resilience invite an analysis of the taming nature myth, in dialogue with the collision of neoliberal and global impacts on rural communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Land of the Long White Cloud (2009)

Also released in 2009, Land of the Long White Cloud is Florian Habicht’s second ode to Northland’s people and place. This time the film takes place on Ninety Mile Beach, Kaitaia, stretched over the five-day Snapper Classic fishing competition. Each day Habicht and his film crew interview a selection of fishing contestants, coastguards, local residents, and visitors with questions of a philosophical nature on such themes as life, death, love, and happiness. Subjects also present subjective reflections on their relationships with the region, including descriptions of the beneficial, sustainable, and life-giving qualities of the foreshore and seabed. As an established and now legalised site of public
recreation, Ninety Mile Beach offers an opportunity for film spectators to acquire knowledge of different cultural views of the foreshore and seabed. However, any unresolved Treaty claims pertaining to this site or associated cultural disharmony in the wake of the recent Foreshore and Seabed legislation debate are overlooked as Habicht’s selective questioning reveals a more urgent perceived threat: the Globalising Other. Through a series of participatory interviews, the subjects express frustration towards the controlling power of world markets, global capitalists, and media corporations. When asked if the global recession will affect the people of Kaitaia, several local residents suggest that Northlanders are survivors who are “used to going without”. Such expressions of rural resilience reflect the subjects’ self-reliance and their complicity within neoliberalism. Through my analysis of selected shots and scenes, I reveal how the local residents also express a sense of separation from the nation as well as the city, which are often treated as synonymous. To this end, I claim that the taming nature myth undergoes daily maintenance in the way that they perceive their own rural lifestyles. Furthermore, the film’s reproduction of this myth satisfies the spectators’ desire to see and know the idealised great rural way of life.

Global Impact on Rural Communities in Aotearoa New Zealand

It has now been more than thirty years since Rogernomics opened up Aotearoa New Zealand to foreign interest and the competitive global market. Judith A Davey asserts, “Globalisation is ongoing, it has a certain inevitability and cannot be ignored” (28). All of the subjects represented in This Way of Life and Land of the Long White Cloud lived through the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) that developed in 2008. Although many of the films’ subjects are dismissive of globalisation, some reflect structural changes, such as advancements in global technologies. They also express concern for the sustainability of their local rural environment. Davey writes that globalisation is both a “threat and an opportunity to rural populations” in Aotearoa New Zealand as “agricultural production and prosperity is closely tied in with the global market and dependent on world price trends” (36). What the subjects within both of my films assert quite clearly is that they don’t want ‘the world’ telling them how to
live. Davey corroborates that rural people “seek recognition and involvement in the decisions which shape their lifestyles and opportunities” (36). Before I embark on my analysis, I will provide a context for discussing these interrelated aspects of globalisation, including key perspectives, issues and impacts.

**Economic Development and Globalisation**
Brian Easton claims that Aotearoa New Zealand’s economy has had two distinct evolutionary eras. The first phase of economic development occurred during the “first 500 years after the arrival of the first Māori settlers around the late 13th century” (1). In this phase, Aotearoa New Zealand remained relatively isolated from the rest of the world. The second phase emerged 250 years after Europeans arrived (1). At this time, the nation entered into the global economy, specialising in the export of “food and fibre” (1). Easton suggests that this is the era in which “the world impacted on the New Zealand economy” for the first time (1):

> From the end of the 18th century New Zealand faced the tension of benefiting from trading with the rest of the world, but losing its autonomy as a consequence – the main determinant of the course of the New Zealand economy has been the world economy. New Zealand’s responses to this external environment have determined the degree to which the economy has prospered (2).

In 2008, Aotearoa New Zealand was yet again “confronted with the fact that its success depended on activities offshore over which it had little control” (13). The most immediate impact of the GFC was a rise in unemployment. What emerged more gradually was the realisation that citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand now lived in a world with an accepted degree of unemployment. This view diverged from the neoliberal rhetoric of the 1980s, which declared that anyone and everyone could have a job. This is now the economic era of ‘joblessness’. It is also the era in which the “Kiwi Dream” of house and land ownership, something long assumed as a national birthright, appears to be slipping further away for an increasing number of New Zealanders (Phillips 5). Consider also how the “Kiwi
Dream” draws new life into the transformative power of labour (5). In the Colonial era, the possibility of land ownership, to be attained through hard honest labour, appeared as a tangible reality. Now, however, the GFC has ostensibly pushed “people out of place” (Brysk et al. 8). For Aotearoa New Zealand citizens, this includes being pushed out of the traditional pathway of house and land ownership. Certainly this is true for the Karenas in This Way of Life as they navigate their own sense of homelessness. They have never owned their own home yet it is something they desire as a family. As house prices soar to record highs in the recovery from the GFC, citizens now seem more accepting that the “Kiwi Dream” may no longer be in their reach regardless of how hard they work (Phillips 5). In this historical moment, the gap between representation and reality is yawning wider for those in pursuit of the “Kiwi Dream” (5).

Globalisation and Local Cultures

Citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand have weathered the after-effects of several world recessions. The aftermath of the 2008 GFC left some countries unable to depend on the world economy. Moreover, in this climate rural residents become particularly vulnerable citizens. As Jerry Mander argues, the hidden costs of neoliberal reforms including the impact of “free trade and deregulation”, especially to vulnerable members of society, demand to be re-examined within the context of “economic globalisation” (qtd. in London 1). Paranoid views of the Globalising Other float to the surface in Land of the Long White Cloud as contestants express a desire for “the world” to retreat. When asked to share his view of “the World”, Rama (a local fisherman), vents his feelings:

I think overseas runs too much of the rest of the country. I don’t know where everybody gets their prices and all that from [and] why they have to listen to what they say prices and all that have to be and how life should be lived... Just live your own bloody life... that’s what I know.

Neoliberalism and globalisation have contributed to the production of the resilient rural subject, as well as psycho-emotional tensions. For example, in This
Way of Life, Colleen Karena acknowledges the present era of global hegemony and contemplates her family’s particular vulnerability as rural residents. Colleen’s observation points away from the myth of idyllic isolation and towards the reality that Aotearoa New Zealand is now very much connected to the rest of world. Brysk et al. argue that the new wave of global connectivity involves “increasing numbers, volumes, and [the] salience of transnational flows of bodies, business, and information, as well as norms” (6). Globalisation, through expanding world markets, impacts on the rights of all citizens and introduces new societal norms. Accordingly, Colleen queries if global change will disrupt the norms of everyday rural life for her and her family. Mander points out that such disruptions often include a loss of “local control” as well as a weakening of “traditional culture” in rural places (qtd. in London 1). Such hidden costs go unstated by the dominant agents of globalisation, such as banks, corporations and governments. As Mander also asserts, “wherever the rules of free trade and economic globalization are followed, you have economic and ecological disasters immediately thereafter” (qtd. in London 1). This is certainly evident with how the reduction of rural subsidies created a ‘disaster’ for rural regions.

Globalisation and Sustainability

Subjects in Land of the Long White Cloud express a duty of care for natural resources, such as land and water. An elderly female fishing contestant reveals that she always thanks the fish that will become her evening meal: an enactment of the ‘take only what you need’ philosophy. A young Māori fisherman discusses his desire to harness natural energy with the use of ecofriendly technology, such as solar panels. Such comments reflect a growing concern towards sustainability and the national economy. This is a recurring concern in Aotearoa New Zealand’s socio-economic history, as State economic growth has always depended upon the mining of limited resources such as gold and oil. Easton claims that even the success of “pastoral farming in the 20th century depended on offshore quarries” to supply mineral fertilisers as well as the oil needed to generate energy (13). Local production has impacted on the quality of air, land and water at a national level and has also contributed to global warming. The subjects in this film advocate for environmental remediation by means of rural maintenance rather
than economic excess by means of increased production and consumption. Mander also advocates for “relocalization”, not only to denote “an economics as if people and the natural world mattered”, but also as a form of political strategy (qtd. in London 4).

However, as the subjects advance their commitment for local sustainability in Northland, the film also engages in myth making. The paradox here is that these rural subjects are advocating for the remediation of their rural environment, which has actually been damaged by the rural industry. Excluded from the film’s representation are the harmful effects and impacts of agricultural and mining industries upon rural land and water. Mike Joy’s research supports this claim. He states that at present, “any economic gain is considered a great thing, regardless of the losses inflicted on the environment or society: neither of which are counted or even mentioned” (1). Once more, how rural life is represented and how things really are does not reflect the contemporary socio-historical reality.

Globalisation and Political Strategy
The economic impact of globalisation on rural communities is but one of the issues referenced in my discussion. Fredric Jameson describes globalisation as “a set of processes” by which each of the following elements combine to produce its totality: “the technological, the political, the cultural, the economic and the social” (49). My analysis focuses on how the subjects of both films perceive and engage with these processes. With regard to the 2008 GFC, for example, many of the subjects exemplify resourcefulness in the economic downturn. As we shall see, in This Way of Life, Peter Karena’s faith in rural self-sufficiency transforms into his own rural self-employment. Whereas in Land of the Long White Cloud, a young Māori fisherman’s contention that global corporations suppress certain ecofriendly technologies to their benefit compels him to desire and imagine his own self-sufficient future. Such positions are exemplary of Jameson’s call for a collective “politics of resistance” towards globalisation (49). However, within these films, I’ll argue that subjects’ reactions to the notions of globalisation take the form of resilience rather than resistance. In the new millennium, a time in which ‘the world appears to be encroaching upon the nation, subjects in both
films assume the taming nature myth and simultaneously assert a belief that one can survive independently from the land. They do so in order to gain a sense of autonomy and to reduce their risk of vulnerability within a volatile global market-driven economy. However, as I have already stated, their desire for rural autonomy has a conservative aspect to it as it maintains their longstanding belief in the great rural way of life. Both films reproduce this myth and connote, through its representation, that it is still possible for all citizens to own land, and to live sustainably off of it. Comparable to the pioneering settlers who sought independence through land ownership, the cruel contradiction here is that the land is not available to all, only to a select few. As I have argued, the myth of land ownership is frequently constituted as a naturalised desire, which reflects the pervasive “Kiwi Dream” (5). I want to restate the important point that this myth does not function only for the rural people represented by these films, it appeals to the desires and imaginings of the largely urban-based citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand, who also constitute the largest audience for my set of films.

In the next section, I provide a textual analysis of selected shots and scenes from This Way of Life. My discussion of the various film techniques and modes of documentary filmmaking will exemplify the workings of the taming nature myth. I will focus on the representation of the relation of rural myth to rurality. The film presents an idealised and mythical view of rural existence, which I argue subjugates the economic reality of the Karena’s rural life in the remote areas of Hawkes Bay, Aotearoa New Zealand.
This Way of Life and the Taming Nature Myth

“Freedom is a very good horse to ride, but to ride somewhere”.
(Matthew Arnold qtd. in Harvey 7)

Matthew Arnold’s observation anticipates this deceptive aspect of neoliberalist freedom. If Peter is to live his life of rural autonomy, he must negotiate the external constraints that impact upon his freedoms. These include interference from his stepfather, state laws (including constitutional laws of land ownership), as well as the perceived impacts of globalisation. For my analysis, I have selected several shots and scenes to discuss the representation of the taming nature myth within the contemporary context of neoliberalism and globalisation.

Figure 27: Peter tames Horse. This Way of Life. (2009).

Desiring Peter’s Way of Life

The photographic image on the DVD slipcover is a long shot of Peter Karena on a horse [see fig. 27]. The horse is raised up on its back legs, restrained in its gallop by Peter’s hand. Through the image’s composition, we are introduced to the taming nature myth. The relationship between man and horse is foregrounded
within an ostensible rural milieu. The emphasis on Peter and his horse compels the spectator to view what the filmmaker deems as important: the act of controlling the animal. The image conveys an ambiguous sense of time in that there are no distinct signs to link Peter and his horse to a specific era. Instead, this image blurs the boundary of past and present to take on a universal quality and to emphasise a particular view of rural life for its spectators. To further complicate matters, this image appears as appropriate to the Western film genre as it does to documentary representation of rural life in modern Aotearoa New Zealand. In this way, this representation is exemplary of what Cowie describes as “mise-en-scènes of desire” which support identification with reality because the documentary image “asserts itself as real” (86). As I have stated in Chapter One, because the reproduction of rural myths pretends to be an expression of real life, this can compel spectators to accept these mythologies as naturalised reality. Thus, mythical representation of rural life, personified here by Peter, operates to suggest that a rural way of life is still universally available to all New Zealanders.

The image caption is a direct quote from Peter, “What do I do for a living? I live for a living.” His words connote freedom. Mythical language operates in these remarks, combined with the image of Peter on his horse, to represent him as a man who is free to live a rural way of life. As we shall see, what is excluded from this image are the neoliberal conditions under which Peter negotiates his sense of freedom. Here and elsewhere the film asserts an equivalency between his way of life and life itself. Such an existential representation of Peter whets the spectators’ appetite for rural myth consumption – nourishing nostalgia for a cinematic exploration of the mythical wild rural frontier. As Cowie reminds us, documentary functions “for spectacle or for knowledge” (11). I argue that this film positions Peter’s rural life as an object of desire, and it engages spectators in desiring to see and know Peter’s way of life. Not only does the film take spectators on a topophilic sightseeing tour of the “hyper-rural” by means of Arcadian visions of a pastoral paradise (Bell 157), this image of Peter on his horse (among a myriad of others) indulges spectators with “an entertaining of the eye” (spectacle) and “an entertaining of the mind” (knowledge) (Cowie 13).
Land and Identity: The Romance of the Rural

*This Way of Life* begins with the darkness of the night sky, accompanied by the sound of gunshots in the distance. A boy explains to the unseen filmmaker that the loud rifle shots belong to his dad’s gun, which identifies Peter as both a father and a hunter. This opening scene also introduces Peter’s son, Llewellyn, as narrator. The child’s voice sets a nostalgic tone, intentionally selected to encourage spectators to view this film through innocent (not yet disenchanted) eyes. It is Llewellyn’s story, though in many respects Peter is also still the idealistic child who is yet to grow weary from the pressures of adult life. The stories he shares are autobiographical, a reflection on his past and present way of life. He exists in a state of primal innocence, believing (just like the pioneering settlers) that he lives in another Eden. This adds an endearing quality to Peter’s camera persona as he goes about his everyday rural life, while the filmmaker and camera become active participants in the storytelling. This documentary predominately utilises a participatory mode by means of interviews and conversations. Direct address to the camera invites the spectator into this particular rural world [see fig. 28]. Here in this scene, and in others, the filmmaker also positions the camera to look over Llewellyn’s shoulder, which signifies an intimate and participatory relationship between the filmmaker, Peter and Llewellyn. In so doing, the camera’s gaze also attempts to simulate a child’s view of the world, synchronising the speech and viewing position of cinematic narration. Identification with the child puts the viewer in a particular relationship with the family, whereby we vicariously take up their way of life.

![Figure 28: Father and Son, This Way of Life (2009).](image)
Immediately following the opening gunshot scene, a montage of landscape shots establishes the remote yet romantic rural setting. As the film cuts to morning, the first light of day reveals what the hunt has produced. While Peter engages with the task of sharpening up his knives, he explains (via a subjective and low-angled camera shot) that the hunt gives life so his family can live: “My children know how they get their meat. Bring a whole animal home, hang them up... the children see what they are. Then they participate in the skinning and the cutting up... and they love it.” As Peter begins the task of preparing the meat, he explains that with regard to his hunting methods, he always treats the animal with respect: “… the onus is on me to do that because of what the animal is giving me... it’s more about being true to your morals or your integrity.” In this scene, a link is being forged between physical work and morality. The overarching myth of the great rural way of life connotes a morally and physically superior way of life in the countryside. However, one striking paradox of the taming nature myth is the equation between violence and morality, which stand in an uneasy relation to each other. Bell suggests that this myth connotes the use of “heroic physical prowess” to transform the wilderness into productivity (147). I claim that the violence associated with such “honest toil” is repressed in order to advance the connection between rural life and morality (147).

Throughout this scene, the spoken narration of Peter’s voice-over alternates with a real-time conversation between Peter and Llewellyn. The former provides reflection on the filmed action and offers a rationale for Peter’s hunting. The latter produces a sense of being there in real time and space. Spectators assume the camera’s gaze and listen in as if members of the family. Here, the selected and ordered images and words present “a feast for the eyes” along with the opportunity to acquire knowledge about hunting methods (Cowie 10). As Peter cuts up the wild meat, the camera functions as a window into a timeless world:

The first time Lely saw me shoot a deer, and he came up to the deer, and it was kicking a bit... it was dead. He got a bit sad, and he says to me, “It died so that we can live, so that we can eat it and live, eh Dad?” I said, that’s exactly what it’s done. He treated
it with respect, and that’s what I want to see in them. Something that I have tried to instill in them is the appreciation for the animal giving its life.

This short sequence connects two significant themes repeated throughout the film: rural autonomy and moral integrity. The film represents Peter as someone who can live autonomously outside the city by connecting with his rural environment. For Peter, his integrity is guided by his interaction with, and respect for, nature. Peter’s conversation implies that he believes that he can preserve his moral identity by taming the wild into productivity. This also suggests that moral wholesomeness resides in a particular relationship with the rural. Peter’s philosophy is reminiscent of the desires of early European settlers. They also desired rural land and the perceived pureness and morality of the rural, which seemed displaced in the Industrial era. As I have explicated in Chapter One, this was the era in which philosophies about the moral and physical superiority of rural life emerged and became popularised in media representations. Settler propaganda supported moving to Aotearoa New Zealand where abundant land would bring good health and prosperity. Thus, an equation was forged between land, opportunity, and autonomy, which is perpetuated and maintained in the film’s representation of Peter’s rural way of life.

The film This Way of Life utilises representational strategies that have precedents in European landscape painting. As I elucidated in Chapter One, throughout the 19th century, the Romantic tradition of painting privileged spectacular visual forms of imagery. Artists such as Constable, Friedrich and Turner applied the techniques of perspectival composition, producing images of nature in vivid yet overwhelming panoramic scale. This offered a form of recompense for the growing sense of displacement from the rural as Europe became increasingly urban and industrial. This Way of Life utilises similar techniques to construct a romantic viewing position of modern rural life for spectators. The spectacle of the rural (natural lighting, tonal composition, panoramic landscapes), as well as the narrative emphasis on Peter’s moral values, creates connotations of ‘romance’, ‘innocence’ and ‘beauty’ [see fig. 29].
Representing the rural in this way enacts a step back in time and into what Samuel and Thompson describe as the enchanted space of the pre-urbanised “good old days” (8). In this regard, the film’s representation of the taming nature myth reproduces the false idea that rural Aotearoa New Zealand remains unaffected by modernisation, and that it can maintain its distance, both literally (geography) and metaphorically (disconnection). As a modern nation, Aotearoa New Zealand is fully connected with the world. As for Peter, the film’s emphasis on his mythical connection with land compensates spectators for the depiction of his difficult set of lived realities, which relates to the broken relationship with his stepfather, Wero.

Figure 29: Edge of the World, Centre of the Universe

**Land for Sale: Peter’s Perspective**

Representation of the taming nature myth privileges Peter’s romance with the rural as much as it naturalises the desirability (or the dream) of rural land and home ownership for citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand, and beyond. With the film’s depiction of rural life, the “Kiwi Dream” is marketed to a broader global culture (Phillips 5). Populations around the globe have long desired a similar ‘dream’ of rural land proprietorship. Peter’s particular rural romance is not exempt from a rollercoaster of confronting and incompatible lived realities. On the surface, his sense of self appears to be entrenched with the land. However, during the course of the film we discover that Peter is himself an immigrant, adopted into a Māori family to which he shares no common ancestry. What is
undeniable is how deeply this complicates his identification (cultural and social) with his rural people and place. Peter is a modern-day settler, occupying land that he does not legally own. In this regard, Peter is far from free to live his self-styled rural way of life. His claim to the land, what he believes is his birthright, is actually a myth. Furthermore, the film’s positioning of Peter’s claims to the land engages with the structures of myth making as it positions this land, which was appropriated from Māori under colonisation, as the birthright of all its citizens. Furthermore, the film does not acknowledge that Peter is staking a claim to land that is already occupied and owned by his Māori stepfather, Wero.

Peter’s main conflict stems from his troubled relationship with Wero. A long-running dispute between the two men culminates in the sale of the Karena house, leaving Peter and his family homeless.38 On the one hand, Wero’s rejection of Peter recalls aspects of Freud’s analysis of the “family romance”. This describes the childhood fantasy of looking to other adults, as alternative parents, for unlimited love. In this context, I suggest that land has become a surrogate parent for Peter, from which he seeks solace and meaning. On the other hand, Wero’s eviction of Peter can be read as an echo of the first settlers’ (Māori) refusal to let the Globalising Other (Pākehā) re-settle in Aotearoa New Zealand. In this respect, to deny Peter this land is to alienate him from his sense of self. As a Pākehā immigrant existing within a Māori cultural worldview, Peter must negotiate his social identities with his own cultural and national origins. To disclaim them will certainly produce the subjective conditions of uncanny displacement, which I use to describe a sense of unease with land, as well as what Turner describes as “contemporary unsettlement”, which is the desire to forget the trauma of settlement (20). I claim that living under such unsettling conditions advances Peter’s retreat into a fantasy while he navigates his future.

As a form of denial, Peter’s initial response is to shrug off the loss of land and home. This is captured in a scene in which Peter and Colleen discuss their present options. The film presents a rupture between the couple as their differing views are captured within separate frames. With the camera tilted up

38 Just after the house was sold at auction, it burns to the ground as the result of an unexplained fire.
so as to frame only Peter with his horse, Peter makes light of his displacement by suggesting that the family live “like gypsies” and “ride around on horses and just live on the sides of the road”. The camera pans across to Colleen to capture her reaction in a separate frame. As she physically moves away from Peter, she pragmatically suggests that they could sell all the horses and move in with her family. Here the narration captures a noticeable fracture in the myth of rural autonomy as Colleen suggests that they sell up, and move to the city. However, the camera’s gaze does not linger in this frame of undesirable reality and immediately cuts back to Peter as he announces that he is going for a swim to forget his troubles.

What follows is a montage of romanticised images of Peter riding his horse into a glistening river, swimming in water, then sitting in contemplation on the river’s edge [see fig. 30]. A musical score with melancholy resonance accompanies all of the shots. Each of the shots serves to emphasise Peter’s romance with the rural. Spectacularisation of Peter on his horse once more connotes ‘freedom’, but it also serves to gratify the desires of the citizen-spectator. Not only does this film indulge the spectator’s desire to know the Other, and to experience the rural, it also privileges a romance specifically with Peter. Here the river acts as a cleansing metaphor, not only for his sullied relationship with Wero, but also as a remedy for his multifarious sense of loss (family, land, home, community). Just like the cleansing rituals enacted by the drivers in Kaikohe Demolition, it is in this space that Peter seeks purification.

![Figure 30: Water as a Cleansing Healer. This Way of Life (2009).](image-url)


Land for Sale: Colleen’s Concerns

For a time, the Karena family takes up residency in a caravan by the side of a river. Within this rural space, Colleen Karena discusses the benefits of communal camping (family bonding, self-sufficiency) and yet at the same time she conveys concern towards their possible future displacement. In dialogue with the (unseen) filmmaker, Colleen reflects on the changing world, “I hope the world still allows us to have a life like this.” Colleen’s unease relates to structural changes that have been augmented by globalisation. For example, Jameson identifies a widespread fear that American culture is replacing local culture and cultural industries:

The standardization of world culture, with local popular or traditional forms driven out or dumbed down to make way for American television, American music, food, clothes and films, has been seen by many as the very heart of globalization (51).

With regard to the cultural component of globalisation, Colleen’s concerns may be grounded in the standardisation of one world culture. Jameson suggests that this process “is clearly, at one level, the result of economic domination” (51). For example, some local cultural industries have been damaged or even shut down by the hegemonic economic activities of their US rivals. Though at a deeper level, Jameson argues that anxieties about globalisation can convert into a social fear that “ethno-national ways of life” will be destroyed (51). For Colleen, her fears are grounded in the global processes that may impact on their rural lives. Although, in her present state of homelessness, Colleen may need to question if the world will in fact allow her to sustain living a rural fantasy or myth.

Land Ownership

The logic that drives the romantic narrative of this film demands a happy ending. To fulfill this requirement, Peter must seek a resolution for his sense of displacement that operates on two levels. He is displaced from both his stepfather and the land from which his stepfather has exiled him. He may not ever resolve the broken romance with Wero but hope still exists for his romance
with the land. In this film, Peter represents a romantic fantasy figure, reminiscent of the resilient pioneering settler. In a manner comparable to the early pioneers, Peter works with nature to navigate his family out of their state of homelessness and into a new way of living and being. Somewhat unwittingly, Peter becomes a neoliberal entrepreneur – a horse trekking company owner. On the one hand, his rural resilience describes his creativity within his precarious rural situation. In fact, he has become a ‘poster boy’ for neoliberalism, just like the demo drivers of Kaikohe Demolition. Here, the film is representing Peter as exemplary of what is possible for rural residents when they put on their ‘creative thinking caps’. In this regard, as rural people appropriate neoliberalism they become heroes and role models for a State system that abandoned them in 1984. On the other hand, Peter’s rural resilience demonstrates his own complicity with a neoliberal system that forced him into his self-reliance. Representing his rural resilience thereby reveals another contradiction within the reproduction of rural myths. A montage of shots, including Peter leading horse treks and exchanging money with his clients, reveals that Peter has resigned himself to a new relationship with capitalism and land ownership:

Just to live the way I want to live, I have to buy into this whole aspect of money and earning money. The other option is that I could just become a gypsy and live on the road with my horses but that gives us no security. I've gotten to the point where I'm gonna have to earn enough money to buy land and say that I own the land... and know I can stay on it... and I can have my horses on my land. It’s a conundrum.

Throughout the film, Peter enacts the taming nature myth. Just like the pioneers, he believes that hard honest toil will secure his “Kiwi Dream” (Phillips 5). For as long as possible, Peter has refused the city, believing it to be corrupt and demoralising, and has engaged as little as possible with material wealth and capitalism. However, in this montage of horse trekking shots we see that Peter now invites the city into his rural home. The flow of capital he receives from city folk on leisure treks supports his dream but there is a need for compromise. As
he concedes, to live the life that he wants to live, the terms of his ‘freedom’ exist within capitalism. Now that Peter is an entrepreneur, he is in fact offering ‘the rural’ as a commodity to ‘the world’. Commodification of the rural thereby enters it into what Jameson has classified as the cultural and the economic “levels of globalization” (50). The commodification of the rural can also be viewed as a global cultural phenomenon. Jameson reminds us that Guy Debord had long ago described, “ours as a society of images, consumed aesthetically” (53). In *This Way of Life*, the documentary “spectacle of actuality” operates in a similar way to represent the rural as a desirable commodity (Cowie 1). This draws new life into the transformative power of labour and its link with land ownership. In *This Way of Life*, the rural is desired as much for its aesthetic image as it is for maintaining the mythical “Kiwi Dream” for citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand (Phillips 5). The reproduction of the myth of land ownership is the reproduction of the desire to own rural land. The documentary desire to know the rural has become wound up in the desire to own the rural, which is also tied up in the citizen-spectator desire for the representation of this rural way of life to be real.

![Figure 31: Peter Rides the Horse of Freedom. *This Way of Life* (2009)](image-url)
Land of the Long White Cloud and the Taming Nature Myth

What would I do with the prize money? Oh, bro... Buy a few pairs of socks... Ya know, a few more hooks... cause I like the hooks that these guys sort of use... Yeah, they're great ones. But, um... I don't know, bro. I guess I'd have to sit back and think about it for a while, eh. (a Māori fishing contestant)

In this section, I provide a textual analysis of Land of the Long White Cloud, a documentary representation of Northland’s premier fishing contest. I want to argue that the filmmaker blurs the borders of reality and fantasy to construct his subjective view of this rural community-based event. As announced from the outset, a grand prize of $50,000 will go to the contestant who hooks the biggest fish. The contestants’ lack of serious regard for the prize money suggests that winning may not be everything. The film’s focus is more on celebrating people and place and less on the quest for capital reward. Here, the contestants discuss their views of survival and rural resilience along with how to live a happy yet simple life. I argue that the film’s counter-position to neoliberalism obscures the very conditions that led these citizens to assume their rural resilience. Furthermore, I argue that any resultant hostility over State neglect becomes displaced onto an unwelcome Globalising Other. My analysis of selected shots and scenes spans the five-day Snapper Classic. I discuss the representation of the taming nature myth, set within the context of neoliberalism and globalisation.

Figure 32: Snapper Classic. Land of the Long White Cloud (2009)
Day One: Survival Strategies

The film begins with an underwater montage that tracks a shoal of fish and the slow movements of a solitary stingray. As day breaks on the foreshore, tracking shots that reveal the fishing contestants are followed by a montage of the broad stretch of coastline [see fig. 32]. The slow-paced observational footage parallels the somnolent start to the day, and a series of sub-titles fills in the details: this is a five-day snapper fishing competition, at Ninety Mile Beach, Far North, Aotearoa New Zealand. During a series of interviews and conversations, which privilege Habicht’s participatory style of filmmaking, the contestants discuss survival strategies – those of the fish, as well as their own:

The human brain is a multifaceted thing that thinks about all sorts of things, mostly bullshit, but all sorts of things... whereas a fish doesn’t. A fish only thinks about eating, reproduction, staying alive.... bit like the Kiwi male, probably. So they’re very simple so they’re focussed. They’ve got big sharks, humans, every normal fatality. They’ve got all sorts of things to fight to stay alive. So they’ve got to be clever or else they’re dead... simple as that... (a seasoned Pākehā fishing contestant)

This fisherman personifies the themes of resilience and survival that are reproduced throughout this film. In this piece to camera interview, he positions ‘a fish’ as akin to ‘a Kiwi male’, who is not only ‘simple’ and ‘focused’ but must also embody a survival instinct while existing in a vulnerable situation. Analogous to this view, Evans and Reid suggest that the term ‘resilience’ has taken on a new meaning under neoliberalism:

Resilience is currently propounded by liberal agencies and institutions as the fundamental property which peoples and individuals worldwide must possess in order to demonstrate their capabilities to live with danger (2).
What this suggests is that in order to survive in the contemporary world, one must embrace 'living dangerously' in order to “become more resilient” (xi). As I have argued in previous chapters, the subjects within my set of films assert their rural resilience as an expression of their self-reliance and complicity within neoliberalism. The paradox is that it was the neoliberal reforms that produced an ongoing economic and social ‘disaster’ for rural areas, and moreover, these rural communities have little choice than to be complicit with their situation of existing within a system of State neglect.

The philosophical banter of the fisherman is also allegorical of the way that Aotearoa New Zealand, as a small nation state, is often characterised as ‘a little minnow’ that battles alongside “the big sharks” of the global economy. Mander claims that nation states (such as Aotearoa New Zealand) which at one time “tried very hard for self-sustainability” eventually had to enter into the competitive global economy (qtd. in London 2). However, economic survival often comes at the expense of local autonomy. This observation stands in an uneasy relationship with the film’s representation of the Northland residents who assert that they can maintain their rural identities as long as ‘the world’ stays out of their backyard. This suggests that the presence of the Globalising Other is felt but is not welcome. The contestants voice their frustration with the processes of globalisation. Indeed, within the context of the recent global recession, one might ask if its processes can ever be reversed, or even arrested. Analogous to this consideration, Jameson has posed this question: “Might regions, even whole continents, exclude the forces of globalization, secede, or ‘delink’ from it?” (49-50) The suggestion from the fisherman above (and from others in the film) is to simply stay focused on astute and localised resilience in order to survive in the modern world. The representation of the subjects’ assertions of ‘self-reliance’ engages with myth making. Selected and ordered interviews and the images of the contestants battling the wild elements of Ninety Mile Beach suggest that they can ‘tame the wilderness into productivity’: on this occasion a much desired big healthy snapper. Excluded from the frame are the years of prolonged State abandonment. The fishing competition thus becomes exemplary of the subjects’ own “capabilities to live with danger” (2).
Living a life of ‘simplicity’ is another recurring theme of this film. It is introduced via one fisherman’s explanation of the ‘KISS principle’ (Keep it simple, stupid) to assert the idea that life should be kept as free as possible of complication. This particular contestant, who identities himself as a city dweller, applies this principle to his attendance at the beach – admitting that while he is there to fish, his main focus is always on having a relaxing time away from his work and city life. His confessional is immediately followed by a sleepy slow-paced long take of a contestant waking from his slumber on the foreshore. This image is followed up with a piece to camera from another contestant who identifies himself as an “office waller”, and then discusses his desire to escape to the beach at weekend. These film techniques construct a celebratory tone for the film wherein the beach is positioned as a site of leisure, and as an escape from urban life for the citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand. This also reproduces for spectators “the sense of a relaxed escape into nature”, another variation of what Phillips describes as the “Kiwi Dream” (5).

For Aotearoa New Zealand citizens the beach is a public site of recreation and regeneration. It also carries different cultural resonance for Māori and Pākehā citizens. Within a Māori worldview, the sea is the foundation of all life, and what Turner describes as “a place traditionally understood as conjoining genealogical history and natural ecology” (31). Along with this cultural understanding is a duty of care and guardianship for the foreshore and seabed. By contrast, the Pākehā relationship to the beach connects with the desire “to enjoy and to exhibit the leisure of a better life” (22). Such desires reverberate from the film’s participatory interviews, which engage the film with the processes of myth making. For example, a contemporary desire for ‘health’ and ‘leisure’ at the beach, as represented in this film, connects with the desires of early European settlers who sought a physically and morally superior lifestyle. Representation of the taming nature myth operates, then and now, to denote the city as ‘crowded, dirty and corrupt’ and the rural as ‘authentic’ and ‘real’. Contemporary citizens, who are predominately urban, thereby take up this myth as a form of recompense for their sense of displacement from rural life.

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39 Refer back to Chapter 2 for an elaboration on Māori worldviews of the Foreshore and Seabed.
This film, unlike the others in this study, expresses what Nichols describes as the poetic mode, which "emphasizes visual associations, tonal or rhythmic qualities, descriptive passages, and formal organization (33). Woven into the narration is a sense of what I term ‘dreamtime’ to describe an allegoric ‘national holiday’ from the ongoing social and economic realities of neoliberalism. Dreamtime operates for the film’s subjects and for the spectators. It occupies both the physical space of the beach (for the contestants) and the cinematic space (for the spectators). Cinematic representation of dreamtime is reflected in the slow somnolent pace of filming and musical accompaniment. Consider, for example, the image below of the fishing contestant waking up from his sleep on the foreshore [see fig. 33]. This image captures the spectacle of dreamtime while a corresponding lullaby soundtrack creates a sense of sleepiness that is akin to taking ‘a metaphorical nap’ from the realities of everyday life. The shot privileges Nichols’ observational mode and what he describes as “direct engagement with the everyday life of subjects as observed by an unobtrusive camera” (31). I claim that lingering behind this observation of actuality are the tacit neoliberal conditions that drive these contestants into taking a self-imposed ‘nap’.

Figure 33: Waking from a Salty Slumber. Land of the Long White Cloud (2009).
**Day Two: Musical Montage**

To use Nichols’ terminology, the performative mode “emphasizes the expressive quality of the filmmaker’s engagement with the film’s subject” (152). In this film, I argue that Habicht performs the pleasure of being at the beach, expressed through his own subjectivity. At the beginning of Day Two of the competition, Habicht presents what Cowie describes as “an entertaining of the eye” in the form of a montage (13). The assembly of shots includes some of the contestants dancing on the foreshore juxtaposed with others battling to stay upright in the surging sea. The musical accompaniment creates the effect of performance wherein the fishing contestants perform their beach activities for the camera. Nichols suggests that moments of performativity invite us, as spectators, to “see the world afresh, and to rethink our relation to it” (209). In this sense, this performance at the beach invokes the spectators’ desire to feel and experience the emotional affect allied with this specific place. Habicht engages the spectator with his own view of the beach as a site of celebration. Performance privileges the spectacle (through form and light) and creates “mise-en-scenes of desire” for spectators who identify with the beach as a site of festivity (Cowie 86).

As the weather turns wild, the film expresses the contextual reality of both the harsh natural elements and of the tough physical demands of the fishing competition. Selected and ordered images depict darkening skies, windswept beaches, and pounding waves. Even an angry stingray appears in the surf. A bearded old man offers seemingly sage advice as the filmmaker struggles to stay upright against the strong gusts of wind. His advice corroborates my earlier claim that in order to survive in this type of competition, the contestants must assert their resilience while navigating the reality of a precariously dangerous situation:

> Well, this type of weather is really good for fishing. They should catch some big fish in this type of weather as long as you are brave enough to be out there and standing up to it. (an old and bearded fisherman)
These words and images depict a dramatic change in the elements and connect with notions of resilience and survival. Here the documentary reproduces the taming nature myth by suggesting that the contestants will be rewarded by their hard honest labour. The depiction also connects with Evans and Reid’s assertion that individuals must personify resilience “in order to demonstrate their capabilities to live with danger” and to be successful in this competition (2).

**Day Three: A Break in the Weather**

Day Three begins with a hopeful ambience, reflected in the brightening weather and the tone of the participatory conversations. Nichols describes the participatory mode of filmmaking as the one that privileges interaction, and by the third day, Habicht’s line of questioning has developed into extended interviews and intimate conversations. Habicht engages with a collaborative voice to offer a “distinctive window onto a particular portion of the world” (180).

Up to this point in the competition, the contestants have mainly discussed their long associations with the area and their survival strategies. On this sunnier day, contestants offer advice on how to be a good and moral person, which they claim can be achieved through one’s own hard work. For example, local fisherman Ozzie Perie shares the following Māori proverb, “Ko te Amorangi kei mua, ko te Hapai kei muri... That is a saying. You pray first, and you achieve something and what you achieve requires your effort to make it happen.” A weathered looking pub patron reproduces Ozzie’s advice as he declares, “There is no ceiling to achievement”. A jaded looking pub goer advises spectators to keep positive but also wary of the Other. Editing cuts to a musical montage in which a man holding the prize-winning snapper elucidates the lyrics, “If you want me, come on and get me”. Such words and images support the dominant neoliberal ideology that all can be achieved through one’s own self-reliance and good hard honest labour.

Curiously, the way that the fishermen perceive themselves (and the way they are represented in the film) is at tension with certain conditions of their own existence. On the one hand, it appears as if they are bucking the trends of globalisation and neo-liberalism by asserting their self-reliance and rural resilience within their own present reality. On the other hand, some of their
thinking plays into the very dynamic that they are trying to defy. This tension describes the double-edged sword of rural resilience. For example, what happened in Northland, in terms of the State’s divestment in the rural, is no less a disaster or a crisis of existence for these rural residents. Their inability to depend on the State or on the processes of globalisation forces them into self-reliance. As such, their means of coping becomes their capitulation. Resilience penetrates neoliberal thought, and these rural subjects internalise it and live it. I propose that the signification of this fishing competition is allegorical for life itself, especially within the context of neoliberalism. The myth that ‘everything is there for the taking’ thus undergoes its insidious and daily reiteration.

The film’s representation of the taming nature myth promotes the poetic spectacle of rural life, while obscuring the very neoliberal conditions that produced resilient rural subjects. The processes of neoliberalism during the historical period of the 1980s produced a divide between Northland and Auckland and a displacement from the State. As the flow of capital shifted from rural industry into city development, Northland residents were forced into a posture of rural resilience. Prolonged State neglect coerced these rural residents into embracing a life of ‘simplicity’, which, I argue, is a term that could easily substitute for ‘poverty’ within this socio-historical context. As the contestants talk about the benefits of their simple lifestyles, I claim that the connotations of ‘rural resilience’ mask the reality of their existence on the poverty line. Consider the following participatory collaboration between Heather, a ‘rough-around-the-edges’ Kaitaia resident, and Habicht. The dialogue establishes her strong rural identity (rurality) as well as her sense of displacement from the city:

It’s a beautiful place up here. It’s beautiful up here. I can’t say much for a lot of the people, but the place itself is beautiful. And the best thing about living up here? It’s a nice slow lifestyle. Actually, it practically stops up here. Compared to Auckland... You don’t get involved in all those kind of things... You don’t have to be one of the flashest... That’s the good thing about being in Kaitaia. You don’t have to be one of the flashest!
Heather’s reflection on life in Kaitaia reproduces the great rural way of life myth and positions an unpretentious rural self in direct opposition to an ostentatious urban Other. While the theme of ‘the ease’ with rural living is reworked into the narrative, there is still little recognition of the larger socio-economic conditions that produce a sense of unease within this rural community. However, the following interview with a local coastguard goes some way towards debunking the myth that Northlanders have chosen this simplistic lifestyle for themselves. The interview also extends Northlanders’ sense of displacement to encompass the Globalising Other:

Habicht: Do you think the recession’s going to affect you?

Coastguard: Nah. Not up here. It doesn’t affect many people up here in the North. We’re used to surviving with little. And um, people just go from day to day and they don’t worry about it. They’re all happy-as. There might be the odd little business that falls over up here but I don’t think there’ll be much... maybe in Auckland. The North is fine.

Not only does this coastguard assert the false idea that it is possible for Northland to disassociate from the rest of the world, he believes that they have already separated. This suggests that Northlanders have already weathered the storm of economic decline, and have reformed and recreated themselves to such an extent that they now feel unaffected by world events. In fact, they never recovered from the permanent economic recession that was brought about by the first wave of neoliberal policies of the 1980s. In this regard, Northlanders are under an illusion of asserting their resilience so as to strengthen their position within the context of globalisation. Furthermore, the coastguard acknowledges (but does not elaborate) the socio-historical context that produced the resilient rural subject. His observation unconsciously cuts to the core of the double-edged sword of rural resilience. Northland residents present themselves as “happy-as” with their simple existence, which requires them to be creatively self-reliant and resilient while “surviving with little”.


**Day Four: Rural Self and Globalising Other**

On Day Four, Habicht extends his selective line of questioning to include the fishing contestants’ perceptions of what I describe as the Globalising Other. The result is an illuminating snapshot of opinions. For example, Rama, a local Māori contestant who is leading the competition, states that the world’s leaders “are idiots” who should not have any influence in the economic management of the country. His spoken opinions are edited alongside a series of long takes wherein he stares out to sea, holding onto his fishing rod, which is pressed firmly into the sand as if guarding the borders from further global intrusion. In the following image of the film’s DVD slipcover, we see Rama (top left) standing guard on the foreshore. This shot is taken just after Habicht asks Rama to share his opinion of “the world”, which produces an affective and hostile response [see. fig. 34].

![Figure 34. Rama Guards the Foreshore. Land of the Long White Cloud (2009).](Image)
Another young Māori contestant refers to the deliberate suppression of certain ‘truths’ by global media corporations. He claims that the suppression is fuelled out of greed: “They only show what they want, just to suffice their own interests”. In this regard, the Globalising Other is constructed out of the fear that citizens may lose their autonomy. Jameson suggests that the political component of globalisation involves the fear or the fantasy of “the spreading of power” (50). As a result, the Globalising Other becomes the target of their fear and hostility. The Globalising Other is not welcome at this site of re-creation. Both of these fishing contestants advocate for localised self-reliance. In fact, the younger fisherman imagines his own “block of land” on which he can live self-sufficiently. He goes on to claim that he could happily be self-sufficient and not ever interact with anyone. This demonstrates the compensatory function of rural myths. For example, the myth of living a happy self-sufficient rural existence has intensified for him and become more real as surely as the desire it involves becomes increasingly unrealisable.

In both these examples, the perceived threat of the Globalising Other has revived the resilience of the Rural Self, whereby the subjects of these films maintain a romantic belief in the great rural way of life. Early settler propaganda circulated depictions of the taming nature myth to denote the city as ‘corrupt’ and the rural as ‘authentic’. Mythical language also operates in a comparable manner in this documentary representation. For example, in this film sequence both of the contestants have constructed the Globalising Other as ‘corrupt’, ‘dishonest’ and ‘greedy’. These meanings attach themselves to the film’s representation of the Globalising Other. In this regard, it is no wonder that these contestants advocate for rural autonomy as a solution to global dominance. Such beliefs connect from the present moment all the way back to the nation’s settlement. The taming nature myth thereby perpetuates connotations of the redemptive qualities of land, and of land ownership.

**Day Five: The Spiritual Pathway**

On Day Five, Rama is announced the winner of the fishing competition. However, the narration does not linger on talk of ‘winning’ or the prize money, but focuses
back on the people of Northland. A montage of shots includes several of the contestants that have appeared in the film. As the musical accompaniment returns to the lullaby, a sense of ‘dreamtime’ returns to both the physical and cinematic space of the beach. After the montage, various contestants share their experiences through a series of participatory conversations. They offer advice on maintaining love and provide ideas on how to live a happy, moral and simple life.

This final day of filming culminates with an opportunity for citizen-spectators to acquire cultural knowledge of this site from a Māori perspective. Bicultural interaction between Māori and Pākehā is something that has been under-emphasised in the film up until this point in favour of privileging collective perceptions of the Globalising Other. However, what this produces is another false synthesis for spectators as the myth of bicultural harmony is reproduced once more. In a collaborative partnership, the filmmaker cinematically guides the spectators along the Māori spiritual pathway, while local Māori resident, Ossie Perie, explains the Māori cultural significance of this beach:

Māori people believe... This beach is a big part of Māoridom. Māori believe that all the spirituality comes along this beach... goes right to the far north... and there it sets off to a new world... You could make that real you know. You could just about see it from there. (Ossie Perie).

As spectators follow the camera’s journey to Spirit’s Bay this seems to be precisely where the film attempts to engage in a category of national myth making. Here, the film is drawing upon Maori mythology, but asserting it as a common spiritual destiny for the nation. Ossie’s desire for the representation to be “real” identifies with the very problematic with which my set of films engages. This is where rural myths, to include mythical structures of identity and belonging, have a compensatory function. Specifically, the film poetically offers a common spiritual destiny as substitute for the reality of an increasingly divided socio-economic future.
Conclusion: Reflections of Taming Nature

Throughout this chapter, I have re-examined the variations of the taming nature myth as expressed by my set of documentary films, within the contemporary contexts of neoliberalism and globalisation. As I have shown, the taming nature myth represents Aotearoa New Zealand as “a land of opportunity” and suggests that all its citizens can own this land and tame the wilderness into productivity through their own hard physical work. It is the interplay of connotation and denotation that expresses this myth. In colonial settlement, the connotations of ‘land ownership’ appeared as a literal denotative opportunity. Now the possibility of land ownership has evolved from a settler dream into the modern-day “Kiwi Dream” (Phillips 5). The myth intensifies as the possibility of fulfilling the dream slips further from the grasp of everyday New Zealanders. I want to suggest that within the contemporary context of neoliberalism and globalisation, the desire for rural land ownership sustains this myth. In This way of Life, we see that Peter Karena personifies the taming nature myth, believing that land ownership will restore his freedoms. In Land of the Long White Cloud, we see that the context of globalisation has compelled these rural residents to imagine a self-sufficient lifestyle as an expression of their rural resistance. To this end, I claim that the taming nature myth undergoes daily reinvigoration within the context of my films. This rural myth functions as a form of compensation for the urban spectators that have become displaced, not only with the “Kiwi Dream” of land ownership, but also with rural life itself (Phillips 5). In this way, the film’s representation satisfies the citizen-spectator’s desire for ruralisation, which describes the way that the urbanisation of Aotearoa New Zealand drives the citizen-spectator’s desire to imagine itself as rural.
CONCLUSION: Reflections of Rural Representations

This thesis began with an observation that celebrations of rural life had begun to feature prominently in a recent cycle of Aotearoa New Zealand documentaries at precisely the moment that the nation had officially become one of the most highly urbanised countries in the world. I have connected this paradox with Cowie’s account of how documentaries offer “mise-en-scènes of desire and imaginings that enable identification” explicitly because the documentary image “asserts itself as real” (86). In this respect, my thesis has argued that the urbanisation of Aotearoa New Zealand is driving a desire for its ruralisation: for the nation to imagine itself as rural. This recapitulates a mode of representation that stretches back to 19th century European settlement. What is undeniable is how my set of documentary films engages spectators in desiring to see and know an idealised view of rural life, as reality. As the gap between representation and reality stretches ever wider, so does the degree to which these films engage with a powerful form of myth making. For as I have stated, myths are the stories that society tells itself in order to justify its own ideologies and processes.

In Chapter One, I examined the relation of myth to identity, as expressed by my set of films. Barthes’ Mythologies provided the template for my examination of myth, and Claudia Bell’s elaboration of Aotearoa New Zealand’s rural mythologies guided my selection of films. My discussion of the films was organised around their expressions of three interrelated yet distinct rural myths: the great rural way of life, rural Arcadia and taming nature. My analyses revealed that these particular rural myths circulated during the processes of 19th century settlement, and have become radically augmented through the contemporary contexts of globalisation and neoliberalism. In Chapter Two, I explored representations of the rural Arcadia myth, as articulated in the films Kaikohe Demolition and The Last Resort. My analysis of these films was located within the contexts of neoliberalism and the foreshore and seabed debate. In Chapter Three, I examined representations of the taming nature myth, as expressed by the films This Way of Life and Land of the Long White Cloud, and set within the context of contemporary globalisation. I discovered that the most important
desire supported by the shared mythologies within these films is that this ‘great way of life’ still exists and is accessible within Aotearoa New Zealand. Documentary representations are uniquely suited to the expression of this desire to see and know the myth of a ‘great rural way of life’ as reality.

I have explored my set of films as sites for contemporary theoretical discussions around national and cultural identities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Rural myths, as expressed within my set of films, also impact upon other structures of identity and belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand. My thesis raises further questions about competing claims to the land, as well as the right of access to rural and coastal land and water. It also raises issues about the significance of rural land and water, especially with regards to unresolved Treaty of Waitangi claims amid contemporary asset sales to foreign investment. For example, the “Kiwi Dream” of land ownership, which is positioned in my films as a national birthright, appears to be slipping further away from the realm of possibility for citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand (Phillips 5). The perceived threat of change arising from globalisation, as expressed by rural subjects within my film examples, suggests a sense of displacement with land and identity. These trends, as identified by my set of films, pose serious questions about the future of New Zealand’s national identity. With regards to the spectacularisation of rurality, Cowie positions the spectacle of reality as “a feast for the eyes”, wherein spectators consume the world through their gaze (10). Representation of rural mythologies thus has a compensatory and stabilising function for citizens struggling to negotiate the urbanised and globalised landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand. I propose that as Aotearoa New Zealand navigates its future direction within the context of globalization, its citizens will probably cling even harder to the spectacle of an idealised and commodified ‘great rural way of life’. 
Works Cited


*The Last Resort: God Defend Our Free Land.* Dir. Abi King-Jones and Errol Wright. CutCutCut, 2006. DVD.

This Way of Life. Dir. Thomas Burstyn. CloudSouth Films, 2009. DVD.


