

Unknown Pictures: Analyzing amateur films as representations and practices of everyday life in Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s

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RESEARCH TOPIC

In the aftermath of the Second World War, film and cinema were of central political, economic, cultural, and educational importance in the newly established Yugoslav State. Thus, a twofold development took place in the cinematic sphere:

Besides the establishment of a professional film industry with strong political and economic interest, film amateurism was politically fostered and institutionalized in ciné clubs. Thereby, ordinary people gained access to filmmaking as a new way of expression, experimentation, and cultural participation. The amateurs began to engage theoretically and practically in filmmaking, organized film festivals, and developed specific film styles in the numerous Yugoslav ciné clubs.

While the amateur film movement is widely known as a hotbed of the Yugoslav New Wave and experimental strands, much less attention is paid to those filmmakers who remained unknown and their numerous amateur productions. In my research, I tackle this lack of research by approaching amateur film making as a practice of the everyday. Doing so, I aim to shed light on the ways in which ordinary people made use of film cameras, practically and visually participated in a mass (media) culture, recorded their surroundings, and aesthetically shaped their experiences. I aim at pointing out 1) the topics which the film amateurs encountered, 2) the audiovisual strategies with which they did so and 3) how they thereby participated in political, social, and artistic discourses — constituting a minor cinema in Yugoslavia and beyond.



Frames: Žemsko (Gal), Dunja Ivanišević, YU 1968, © Kino Klub Split

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Taking amateur films into consideration as practices and representations of the everyday life, I ask for the ways in which film technology was used by ordinary people to express themselves and participate in discourses. My research questions thus are: Which discourses and topics are represented in the films and how are they dealt with, negotiated, appropriated? How did the amateurs bridge quotidian and the artistic experiences? To what degree or in which form were the films political (critical, subversive, affirmative)? Moreover, which artistic regimes and interdependencies with other film and art practices can be seen? What are prevalent genres, formal styles and film languages that were used in the films?

METHODOLOGY

For my film corpus of around one hundred short amateur films, I am using film analysis with a focus on the context and on the formal elements and film language. Further, I embed this film-centered approach in a grounded theory through which the films, archival documents as well as interviews with (former) ciné club members, will be mapped and analyzed, connecting the manifold visually represented discourses and various aspects of the practice of amateur film making.



Frames: Zajedno do kraja/Together till the end, Jozef Mađar, YU n.k., © J. Mađar

AIMS

With my research project, I aim at shedding light on neglected film practices in Yugoslav film history in order to widen the understanding of cinema, going beyond its commercial and professional practices. My research is yet more than an inventory of amateur film productions. With the approach to amateur films as representations and practices of the everyday, I intend to highlight the participation of ordinary people in the shaping the visual modernity. Thereby, it will also be possible to locate Yugoslav amateur film in a transnational development and thus show linkages of a vernacular film culture with a much larger context.



Frames: Zastava/Flag, Marko Jovanović, YU 1969 © Kino Klub Ljubljana

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