

EXPERIMENTATION OF ANYONE

YUGOSLAV AND POST-YUGOSLAV EXPERIMENTAL FILM (1958-nowadays)

¹Ivan Martinac, answering Levantić in the survey "Little filmmakers we are the real army" (Sineasti maleni mi smo vojska prava) in *Sineast* 3, 1968, Sarajevo

²From *amateur to alternative film (Od amaterskog do alternativnog filma)*, Branislav Mitojević, YU film danas, Niš, 2013/ p. 77 Youth cinema clubs in our country (Kino klubovi mladih kod nas) Dušan Stojanović and p.110- Filmmakers in short pants (Filmađizije u kratkim pantalonama), Srđan Karanović/

³On March 22nd, 1895, the first screening took place for a small circle of professionals, at the Société d'Encouragement pour l'Industrie Nationale in Paris, at the Salon Indien du Grand Café. An article published in La Poste of December 30, 1895 and quoted in many publications of the time, commented: "It is a workshop door that opens and lets out a flood of workers, with bicycles, running dogs, cars; all of this is bustling and teeming. It is life itself, it is the movement taken from life." concluding in enthusiasm "When these cameras will be delivered to the public, when everyone will be able to photograph the beings who are dear to them, no longer in their immobile form, but in their movement, in their action, in their familiar gestures, with words at the tip of their lips, death will cease to be absolute.", published 27. 4. 2015 on the site of the Grand Palais, Paris during the exhibition "Lumière! Le cinéma inventé"

⁴Yugoslav experimental film found its inspiration in different echoes of the common world: Yugoslav amateurs read carefully the texts of Liborio Termine ("Sense of Super 8"), Maya Deren ("Amateur versus professional"), Amos Vogel ("Film as subversive art") and their films were in some way created (according to the testimony of some of them) as an anticipation of the current of avant-garde film that P. A. Sitney called in 1969 "structuralist film", and David Curtis further expanded through the category of "minimal film".

⁵"La parole n'est pas plus morale que les images" "Les intellectuels sont devenus des médecins qui ne soignent pas. Ils sont là pour dire et répéter que la société est malade.", Jacques Rancière. Propos recueillis par Olivier Pascal-Moussellard Télérama n° 3074 décembre 2008.

Experimental short film in socialist Yugoslavia found its base in the so-called "amateur film" which was developed in amateur cinema clubs across all the major cities of the federation after the Second world War: in People's Technics (*Narodna tehnika*) clubs and, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, as a singular and intriguing phenomenon that lasted until the breakdown of the country in the early 1990s. This proceeded in accordance with the open laboratory of self-management which was the basis of the emancipatory project in SFR Yugoslavia as self-management and self-organization were spread from the factories to the field of culture. According to a survey conducted by one of the Yugoslav amateur filmmakers from Bosnia and Herzegovina (Zlatko Lavanić) "cinema clubs in Yugoslavia were, without a doubt, the only places where a group of people, despite individual differences, could form a common aesthetic platform"¹. Moreover, the cinema clubs were part of the socialist project of spreading art and technological achievements not only to professional and academic circles, but to all layers of society based on the hypothesis that everyone (also children)² is capable of emancipation and experimentation, incorporating a range of experiences and media, including ones based in production of films.

Thus the tireless experimentation of Yugoslav amateur filmmakers fundamentally moved from the initial practice of amateur film, begun in 1895 when Auguste Lumiere filmed his daughter Andrée, in *Le Déjeuner de bébé* (0:38) and *La Pêche aux Poissons Rouges* (0:44), opening the wide new horizon of the "family film" and with it, the great advertising pitch used by amateur camera manufacturers of the 20th century: the possibility to immortalise the faces of one's loved ones³. Although the family film remained for a long time the king of amateur cinema, the Yugoslav amateur film adventure⁴ has broadened its perspective: onto experimental society and all its transformations — through film and in film.

In some way Yugoslav experimental amateur creation reverses Godard's statement from *Notre musique*, stating according to Rancière's interpretation that for Godard "fiction is a luxury, and that the only thing left for the poor, for the victims, is to show their reality, to bear witness to their own misery"⁵. Affirming that true critical art must displace this type of fundamental division, Yugoslav amateur cinematic experimentation stays as a kind of counter-witness to such a logic. It shows that the social and political narrative of the emerging experimental egalitarian and emancipatory society that has witnessed many losses during anti-fascist struggles in the Second World War, could be transmitted through some kind of experimental aesthetic materialism: through the highest level of abstraction and poetization - a capacity inherent and belonging to *all*. Just as Godard's entire poetics does, inventing new languages and new fictions for old struggles.

However, despite the wave of Yugoslav amateur film which ended in some way in its own negation - in the dissident professional-author film, a large part of the Yugoslav amateur cinematographers continued for many years traveling to the most unexpected and undiscovered territories and waters, preserving at every point the deeply impregnated topics of the collective and emancipation. And as one of the most distant points on the map of realized freedoms, the culture-politics of amateurs of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia left behind itself the Festival of *Experimental Genre Film* for interdisciplinary enthusiasts. GEFF (1963-1970) was a specialized experimental and unconventional amateur film festival that dealt primarily with the non-existent, as the existing was constantly being questioned. Its goals were:

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⁶ *First day 19.12. 1963 ("Prvi dan 19.12.1963")*, in Mihovil Pansini, Vladimir Petek, Zlatko Sudović, Kruno Hajdler, Milan Šamec- Prva Knjiga GEFFA 63/1, Zagreb, 1967

⁷ *Du film amateur au film alternatif (Od amaterskog do alternativnog filma)*, Branislav Mitojević, YU film danas, Niš, 2013.

⁸ Due to the impossibility of still accessing digitized examples of amateur films made by young people and children, this selection includes in addition to the majority of male authors, also some precious female authors. Although their minority presence in the selection represents only the reality of the general minority presence of women in the field of amateur experimental cinema – an important area for further research.

⁹ *Spaljivanje (Incineration)*, Vladimir Petek, in *Film's bulletin, the amateur film journal* n° 12 (*Filmski bilten, amaterski filmski časopis* 12), 1966, Beočin, Jugoslavija.

¹⁰ Latin *amat* is a third-person singular present of the verb *amō*, meaning *He, she, it - loves*. The title of the experimental Yugoslav amateur film program in Aalto University, Helsinki, 2019 and Slovenian Cinematheque, Ljubljana 2020, was *Politics Of Amateurs: From Amato To The Experiment- Yugoslavia Case*, (program proposed by Ivana Momčilović).

To fight conventional film, and especially against conventional work in an amateur movie. To get the amateur film out of the tight amateur box, to break the boundaries that exist between amateur and professional film. The film is one, as was concluded on the consultations in Sarajevo a year ago talked about the definition of amateur film (...) We were not working to determine what an amateur movie is. Someone makes a movie as an amateur, and a professional is in the profession. On the other hand, one amateur movie can be subsequently sold. So it is not possible to say what is amateur, what is a professional film. If we can not determine this, then there is no reason to divide films into amateur and professional ones⁶.

Geff's tasks are: to stimulate the development of research work, to encourage experimenters, to acknowledge their work, to take amateur film out of the amateurish, to deepen the meaning of creation, to give it an equal meaning with other human activities, to demystify film as art, to take it out of the narrow film's field, to connect it with all human activities.

Film cannot be separated from contemporary philosophical thought, from new tendencies in painting, sculpture, architecture, music, literature, ballet, from technique and science, from society, from nature, because these are the parts of life that we live.⁷

Conclusion: The selection of short experimental films proposed for screening on the 5th floor of the Center d'Art Contemporain Geneva, during autumn / winter 2020/21, will show several singularities of the Yugoslav poetic and political project: the dialectical relation and correlation between amateurism and experimentation; the specific Yugoslav topography of "brotherhood and unity" (film clubs Split-Zagreb-Belgrade); the relationship between layered experimental film expressions and concrete "realization of freedom" working on the socially/politically "unimaginable" (GEFF festival; experimental amateur documentaries by Krsto Škanata); the influence of the self-managing social project on the autonomy of cinema clubs as well as the influence of strengthening the amateur approach towards reality (and art) in transforming the individual and reality through the most abstract forms and inventions. This selection will show only the surface a rich heritage that relies on the many, on everyone⁸. If the considerable part of these attempts are still in the digitization phase, many have simply not been preserved (let us remember for example the cinematic act of burning the tape in the projector in Zlatko Hajdler's *Kariokineza*). But as Hajdler's act of burning his "film" (December 14, 1965) emerges as a close echo of the immolation of US citizen Norman Morrison in front of the Washington Ministry of Defense (November 2, 1965) in protest of the Vietnam War⁹ - the poetic and political roots, deeply human, revolutionary and emancipatory of Yugoslav amateur experimental films should be found precisely in the hidden and magical reverberations of everyday life, which at the time, as nowadays, needed to be constantly transformed. Such a sensible reconfiguration of reality, through the active participation of everyone, repeatedly questions the position of amateurs in the historical context of displacement and dehierarchization of knowledge and power: the position of the new role of the *creator* in an egalitarian society, in which this role belongs to all and by that is deeply *political*. The development of Yugoslav amateur cinematography and its direct link to experimental film shows finally that the amateur approach does not lead, as it was doubted, into dilettantism but, on the contrary, into the most subtle forms of emancipation, abstraction and novelty. From *amat* to experiment¹⁰.

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The selection is proposed by Ivana Momčilović, dramaturge, researcher and interdisciplinary educator, coordinator of Phd In One Night – collective platform for aesthetic education for all.

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**L'Experimentation de n'importe qui (Experimentation of anyone)*
- title of Anders Fjeld's Doctoral thesis, Paris Sorbonne, 2016 using the following quotation from Jacques Rancière:

“The only communist legacy that is worth examining is the multiplicity of forms of experimentation of the capacity of anybody, yesterday and today. The only possible form of communist intelligence is the collective intelligence constructed in those experimentations”.-
Communists Without Communism, Jacques Rancière- in The Idea of Communism, Verso, 2010