

# When Workers Leave the Factory

## Amateur Filmmaking in the Eastern Bloc

Orphan Film Symposium 9  
EYE Institute, Amsterdam  
April 1, 2014

Presenters: Chris Wahl (HFF Konrad Wolf), Ralf Forster (Filmmuseum Potsdam), Jiří Horníček (National Film Archive, Prague), Maria Vinogradova (New York University).

Moderator: Katerina Loukopoulou (Panteion University, Athens)



Amateur cinema was regarded as a matter of public importance in Eastern Bloc countries on their way to socialism. State institutions supported and encouraged the emergence of new film collectives, mobilising professional filmmakers to advise amateurs, and running networks of filmmaking facilities nationwide, available at no cost to anyone willing to make films. Amateur film studios were attached to large factories, universities, traveler clubs and "palaces of culture".

The culture of amateur film collectives and studios in most cases did not outlive the regimes that supported it, and ceased around the early 1990s. What it left behind is a legacy of small film collections still shelved in the vaults of factories, back rooms of houses of culture, in private hands, and occasionally at state archives. Films in these collections range from newsreels, industrial, corporate and instructional shorts to completely "useless" works, such as fiction films, animation and occasional experimental films. Today they present a rich evidence of the everyday life, social interactions and largely forgotten minor film cultures in states that no longer exist.

This program brings together amateur films made in the 1960s – 1980s in three Eastern Bloc countries: GDR, Czechoslovakia and the USSR. Chris Wahl will present a film produced by the prominent East German factory studio EKO Eisenhüttenstadt recently digitized within the Media Heritage initiative at Film and Television Academy (HFF Konrad Wolf, Potsdam). Ralf Forster (Filmmuseum Potsdam) will present GDR satirical short films from the museum's collection. Jiří Horníček, the curator of amateur film section at National Film Archive, Prague, will introduce and screen two amateur animation films from 16mm prints recently made by the archive. Maria Vinogradova (New York University) will highlight the frequent use of professional 35mm format by Soviet cine amateurs and present two films made by Leningrad studios.

***Chronicles of Izhor-Film*, 10'20"**

People's Film Studio Izhor-Film, Leningrad, USSR, ca 1987,  
16mm, bw, silent. Screening format: 16mm.

*A home movie of a kind, this film portrays life and times of its studio, using fragments and outtakes from its earlier films, demonstrating tricks and filming each other.*

**Live piano accompaniment by Stephen Horne**

**Introduction by Katerina Lokopoulou (Panteion University, Athens)**

**Chris Wahl (HFF Potsdam)**

**"Grab the Camera, Pal!" – The Film Studio of Iron Hut Combine Eisenhüttenstadt**

***Archäo-Logisches (Archaeo-Logical Stuff)*, 12'30"**

EKO Eisenhüttenstadt, 1966.

16mm, bw, sound. Screening format: digital video.

*An allegedly satirical take on how public and especially green spaces are being vandalized in Eisenhüttenstadt.*

**Ralf Forster (Filmmuseum Potsdam)**

**Useful Humor and Releasing Laughter: Satirical Shorts in Amateur Cinema of the GDR**

***Milchig-Trübe (Milky Fishy)*, 2'**

Amateur Film Studio, Potsdam, 1983.

16mm, color, sound. Screening format: digital video.

*Children snatch at milk bags in leaking packages. The milk trust accept the reclamation and finds his own (absurd) way to deliver the missing milk.*

***Der Favorit (The Favorite)*, 2'44"**

Angelika and Horst Butter, Berlin, 1982.

16mm, color, sound. Puppet animation. Screening format: digital video.

*A star figure skater wins a competition – wrongly and with some injuries.*

***Der Minister kommt (The Minister Comes)*, 5'30"**

Frank Dietrich, Amateur Film Studio Senftenberg, 1984.

16mm, color, sound. Screening format: digital video.

*Application of computers in the industry: dusty robots are briefly put to work as the secretary of states is visiting the factory.*

**Jiří Horníček (National Film Archive, Prague)**

**Against the War and Totalitarian Power:**

**Two Examples of Socio-Political Reflection in Amateur Animated Films**

***X + Y*, 7'**

TIGR (Koplík-Groz-Tichý), 1963.

16mm, color, sound. Screening format: 16mm.

*Little girl playing with a ball on the boundary line of two opposing armies. Initial situation inspired by the atmosphere of cool war.*

***Mašinerie (Machinery)*, 10'**

Pavel Bárta and Zdeněk Lorenz, 1985.

16mm, color, sound. Screening format: 16mm.

*Failure of the machine becomes a cause for realizing other options of existence, different from those originally programmed.*

**Maria Vinogradova (New York University)**

**"Soviet Amateurs Are So Serious"**

***Na odnoi zemle (On the Same Earth)*, 10'40"**

People's Film Studio at DK Proftekhobrazovaniya, Leningrad, 1976.

35mm, color, sound. Screening format: digital video.

*Soviet dance ensemble boards a ship and travels to Canada at the time when traveling abroad was akin to flying to the moon.*