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**CINEMA-TECHNICIANS. THE HISTORY OF AMATEUR FILM  
IN THE PERIOD OF POLISH PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC AS A  
HISTORY OF TECHNOLOGY<sup>1</sup>**

A year ago I have enrolled in Amatorski Klub Filmowy SAWA (Amateur Film Club) in Warsaw, which is one of the most-titled and longest-existing (continuously for almost forty years) AKFs. Moreover it is one of the few still existing clubs of this kind in Poland. From the very beginning, I was stunned how big emphasis is put there on the technical side of filmmaking. At this time, I didn't know anything about apertures and lens filters, white balance settings or DIN and ASA values. Stepping into the SAWA's doorstep, I felt that I was entering a completely strange territory without any map or instructions. I've already known about a few courses of filmmaking for nonprofessionals<sup>2</sup>, but they mostly had similar curriculums: participants worked on their own projects and in the meantime they learnt about how to find a topic for a film, what is important during screenwriting, and how to shoot and edit the material. But in SAWA dominated a different model of teaching.

Few years ago, the Club changed a formula typical for the AKFs, in which a group of amateur filmmakers met regularly once a week or more often. Under the watchful eye of an instructor they worked together on films. After, the best films were sent for contests and film previews. Currently, club offers two-terms long courses dedicated to a broad range of people: pupils, students, adults and seniors, those who look for a new hobby or want to expand their qualifications. The first

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<sup>2</sup> Including e.g. workshop projects provided by New Horizons Association or the Film Kindergarden of Wajda School.

term was dedicated to cinematography classes. For half a year we were sitting in the cellar of the public library in Warsaw's Bielany district not having any idea about what we would like to film, or even what is the actual difference between making films and watching them. Instead, we were listening to the lectures about lenses, film gauge widths or cameras set-ups, and analyzing frames exposition, image focus or the quality of editing.

Above all, we kept our ears open for endless anecdotes and stories about making amateur films during the communist times, the big times of this club, what combinations were necessitated to gain an extra film reel, how amateurs altered Soviet cameras to be able to shoot in more 'American' style, about the only lab in Warsaw, where film reels were developed without overexposing them. During those few months, instead of learning how to make films, we were getting to know the history of amateur film movement from the communist period, a history from the perspective of technology.

In my opinion, if there is any history of the Polish amateur movement of those days, it is the history of technology: changes in types of film reels, accessible or lacking film equipment, but also the system in which amateur film clubs existed and the methodology of educating its members. At least this kind of narration about the movement, which doesn't exist anymore, emerges from what is left, the few publications or articles in specialist magazines.

I do not claim that amateur cinema from that period has only one history. But to construct a different narration, which would be perhaps closer to the canon of film studies, one needs to find tons of film reels, hidden in closets, cellars or attics, listen to stories of former members of AKFs and try to understand the system in which those clubs functioned. This kind of history should be definitely researched and written. But it is also worth to delve into the history which is accessible, because even this one is not really well-known. In my paper I would like to undertake this task.

### **Amateur cinema that is a small-gauge cinema**

How to define the amateur cinema of those days? It's a vain attempt to search for information in film studies papers about Polish cinema and its history. Few papers dedicated to this topic were written

mostly during the 1960s and the 1970s, frequently by amateurs themselves. It is worth to mention about: *Film amatorski w Polsce*<sup>3</sup> (Amateur Film in Poland) and *Kręcimy film amatorski*<sup>4</sup> (We Shoot Amateur Film) by Wiesław Stradomski, *Elementarz filmowca amatora 8mm*<sup>5</sup> (Primer of the 8 mm-Amateur Filmmaker), *Film amatorski bez błędów*<sup>6</sup> (Amateur Film Without Mistakes) and *Wybrane zagadnienia techniczne filmu amatorskiego*<sup>7</sup> (Selected Technical Problems of Amateur Film) by Ryszard Kreyser, *Film amatorski*<sup>8</sup> (Amateur Film) and *Organizujemy amatorski klub filmowy*<sup>9</sup> (Organizing an Amateur Film Club) by Wiktor Ostrowski. As those titles suggest, the books focus on technical aspects of filmmaking. Only one of them, *Film amatorski w Polsce* is an attempt to characterize the movement. It brings the following definition of amateur cinematography:

Creative work, which is put into producing an amateur film is not chargeable. The need for exploitation can't be the reason for amateur filmmaking. It has to be an ambition to express creator's thoughts, impressions and observations in such a way that is the most suitable for him and interesting for his audience. The audience could be author's family circle, his specific social surrounding and in the most precious cases – all film art enthusiasts. Almost all amateur films are art films, because as a whole or in their salient parts they are a result of the creative activity of one person, who is simultaneously a scriptwriter, director, cameramen and editor of his or her own film. (...) Amateur film differs from a professional one by one more feature - the size and type of photosensitive material. Amateurs shoot their films on the so-called 'small gauge' using adequately miniaturized equipment.<sup>10</sup>

3 W. Stradomski, *Film amatorski w Polsce*, Centralny Ośrodek Metodyki Upowszechniania Kultury, Warszawa 1971.

4 This authors, *Kręcimy film amatorski*, Centralna Poradnia Amatorskiego Ruchu Artystycznego, Warszawa 1966.

5 R. Kreyser, *Elementarz filmowca amatora 8mm*, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1970.

6 These authors, *Film amatorski bez błędów*, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1975.

7 R. Kreyser, *Wybrane zagadnienia techniczne filmu amatorskiego*, Centralny Ośrodek Metodyki Upowszechniania Kultury, Warszawa 1971.

8 W. Ostrowski, *Film amatorski*, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1972.

9 This author, *Organizujemy amatorski klub filmowy*, Centralna Poradnia Amatorskiego Ruchu Artystycznego, Warszawa 1964.

10 „Praca twórcza włożona w powstawanie filmu amatorskiego jest nieodpłatna. Motywem realizacji filmu amatorskiego nie może być chęć eksploatacji lecz pragnienie wyrażenia za jego pośrednictwem myśli, wrażeń i obserwacji twórcy w formie

Stradomski doesn't mention that amateur cinema distinguishes also that this type of cinema is made by people without any formal film education. Nevertheless, this seems obvious for him since he contrasts amateurs with professional filmmakers.

However, it's hard to completely agree with the above-mentioned definition. In many cases amateurs gained financial profits from their films, because the prizes for numerous contests were monetary. Certainly, amateur films were composed of thoughts, impressions and observations of their creators, but it isn't specific only to the small gauge cinema. One can claim that this is also true when speaking about professionals' works. Amateur cinema has its own audience, comprising of relatives and friends of the makers as well as other unprofessional filmmakers. Although, this type of film was also presented in television<sup>11</sup> where it could be seen by broader audience. Stradomski also suggests that amateur films were an 'art films'. However, it's important to remember that AKFs promoted collective model of work and what is more – many films were signed not by one, but few authors<sup>12</sup>.

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najbardziej odpowiadającej jemu samemu oraz zainteresowaniom ściśle określonej widowni. Może nią być własny krąg rodzinny czy określone środowisko społeczne oraz w przypadkach najcenniejszych – wszyscy miłośnicy sztuki filmowej. Prawie wszystkie filmy amatorskie są filmami autorskimi, bowiem w całości lub w najistotniejszych swych składnikach są wynikiem działania twórczego jednej osoby, która jest jednocześnie scenarzystą, reżyserem, operatorem i montażystą swego filmu. (...). Film amatorski różni od zawodowego jeszcze dwie istotne cechy: format i rodzaj materiału światłoczułego. Amatorzy kręcą swe filmy na tak zwanej «wąskiej taśmie» przy użyciu odpowiednio zminiaturyzowanego sprzętu.”, W. Stradomski, *Film amatorski w Polsce*, ..., pp. 5-6.

11 For instance, Andrzej Jurga used to invite amateur filmmakers to his programs in television which was documented in *Amator (Camera Buff)* by Krzysztof Kieślowski, where Jurga played himself. Examples from small gauge films were presented in programs such as *Magazyn Filmowy 'Klasy'* and *Kino Filmów Amatorskich*. See: This author, p. 71.

12 For instance: *Spojrzenia* by A. Błasiński and D. Szczuchura from AKF 'Warszawa', which gained the first prize on III Ogólnopolski Konkurs Filmów Amatorskich in Warsaw in 1955; *Kasztany*, by J. and A. Badura, J. Bruchmiller, J. Myszką from AKF 'Śląsk' at WDK in Katowice, honored by first prize on IV Ogólnopolski Konkurs Filmów Amatorskich in Warsaw in 1956; *Regi Polonia (Przemysław)* by D. and J. Maćków and S. Fischer also from AKF 'Śląsk', honored by the Big Prize during V Ogólnopolski Konkurs Filmów Amatorskich in Warsaw in 1957, or *Trzy bez atu* by R. Kreyser and J. Vaulin from AKF 'Warszawa', which won the first prize at the same contest. See: This author,

In fact, the only undeniable difference between amateur and professional cinema indicated by Stradomski is the technological one – the size and type of film gauge, differences in cameras, projectors and all additional equipment. This was also manifested in the nomenclature as the amateur cinema was called ‘mała kinematografia’ (the small cinematography) or ‘kinematografia wąskotaśmowa’ (the small-gauge cinematography). It is underlined in those terms that amateur films were made not on the professional 35 mm gauge, but on gauges such as 16 mm, 8 mm, SUPER 8 mm, and before that on the 9.5 mm Baby Pathe and many others.

Also followers of AFK’s filmmakers are a good source of knowledge about the technological history of amateur cinema. In the history of the Polish independent cinema from the political transformation to the first decade of the twenty-first century written up by Piotr Marecki<sup>13</sup>, the former film clubs are mentioned only sporadically. In this context, the opinion of Wojciech Koronkiewicz, the author of one of the most popular films of native independent cinema of the 90s – *Fikcyjne pulpety*, is very symptomatic. Koronkiewicz was a member of the AKF ‘Projektor’ from Białystok for a short period of time and this is what he said: ‘It was a consequence of the situation before 1989, when probably the only film clubs had such equipment as cameras, film reels and projectors for film screenings. After 1989, it turned out that people in town mostly have better equipment than the club.’<sup>14</sup> The author of *Fikcyjne pulpety* explains the existence and popularity of the AKFs by the lacks of equipment which was too expensive for most of the amateurs. The collapse of the clubs happened when the technology changed (together with the political system) which made the equipment much more accessible and the clubs redundant. If the history of the AKFs from the communist period is the history of technology, it is hard to imagine its ending which would be more adequate than the one mentioned above.

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pp. 218-221.

13 See: P. Marecki, *Kino niezależne w Polsce 1989-2009. Historia mówiona*, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa 2009.

14 „To wynikało z tego, że przed 1989 rokiem chyba tylko kluby filmowe dysponowały takim sprzętem jak kamery, taśmy filmowe i projektory do wyświetlania. Po 1989 okazało się jednak, że ludzie w mieście mają z reguły lepszy sprzęt niż klub.”, P. Marecki, ..., p. 177.

### **'Kinotechnik' – the forum of the amateur movement from the communist period**

In *Film amatorski w Polsce* Wiesław Stradomski mentioned that the amateur movement didn't have its own press, nevertheless articles about nonprofessional cinema were published in a few specialist magazines (such as 'Fotografia', 'Kamera', 'Kultura i Ty'), particularly in the 'Kinotechnik' (Cinema-technician), which conducted a special section between 1955 and 1965 dedicated to amateur filmmakers<sup>15</sup>. The magazine, which was published from 1948, was directed mostly to technicians and projectionists. Texts placed in 'Kinotechnik' were related to technical aspects of cinema, they also gave information about new equipment, its usage, conservation and potential problems with it. The magazine also integrated and engaged the community of its readers. One could read about schools and courses for the projectionists, get to know the workers of local cinemas and learn something about their everyday problems. Also, the editorial staff of 'Kinotechnik' answered more or less practical questions sent by the readers, and from time to time, entertained them with riddles and specific sense of humor.

It is hard to omit the amateur cinema in the 'Kinotechnik' in the period 1955-1965. Articles, announcements, reports as well as advertisements related to this type of cinema appear in the predominant majority of the issues (and from 1957 to 1961 amateur film was mentioned in every issue of the magazine). Usually in one issue, a few articles dedicated to the small gauge cinema were published. What is more, for the number of years even the covers of the 'Kinotechnik' encouraged the amateurs to buy the magazine. Especially in the turn of the 1950s to 1960s the small gauge film was regularly mentioned there<sup>16</sup>.

It's hard to doubt that this magazine played an important role in the movement. Announcements and advertisements prove it: 'Amateur

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15 W. Stradomski, *Film amatorski w Polsce*, ..., p. 72-73.

16 In 1959 the amateur film appeared on six covers of the 'Kinotechnik', in 1960 – on ten, and from 1961 to 1964 in turn: on eight, seven, six and five.

filmmakers! Read and subscribe monthly "Kinotechnik", the only magazine that runs the section for the amateur film constantly. Send us hints and articles about your work and your clubs'<sup>17</sup>, 'All amateur film clubs in Poland are subscribed to the monthly "Kinotechnik"'<sup>18</sup>.

What could the amateur-filmmakers read in this magazine? A few rubrics dedicated to the enthusiasts of small gauge cinema appeared there: the most extensive 'Film amatorski' (Amateur Film), but also 'Technika wąskiej taśmy' (The Technique of the Small Gauge), 'Głosy filmowców amatorów' (Opinions of the Amateur Filmmakers) and 'Z problemów filmu amatorskiego' (From the Amateur Film Issues). It's hard to describe the difference between those rubrics – in all of them various texts dedicated to nonprofessional cinematography appeared: articles about an equipment, its use<sup>19</sup> and a film technique<sup>20</sup>, reports from contests and film previews<sup>21</sup>, attempts of identifying the specificity of the amateur cinema<sup>22</sup> and descriptions of the AKFs movement<sup>23</sup>, the film industry opinions on the small gauge cinema<sup>24</sup> and announcements

17 „Amatorzy-filmowcy! Czytajcie i prenumerujcie mies. «Kinotechnik», jedyne czasopismo stale prowadzące dział filmu amatorskiego. Nadsyłajcie do nas wzmianki i artykuły o pracy waszej i waszych klubów.”, 'Kinotechnik' 1956, no 96, p. 1993.

18 „Wszystkie amatorskie kluby filmowe w Polsce prenumerują miesięcznik «Kinotechnik».”, 'Kinotechnik' 1961, no 151, p. 3329.

19 See: inż. R. Kreyser, *Amatorska kamera filmowa*, 'Kinotechnik' 1955, no 80, p. 1604-1605; inż. J. Figwer, *Krótki opis radzieckiego aparatu zdjęciowego typu 16 S-1*, 'Kinotechnik' 1956, no 95, p. 1961; inż. R. Kreyser, *Nowe filmy zdjęciowe produkcji „Agfa” do filmów odwracalnych Agfacolor*, 'Kinotechnik' 1957, no 110, p. 2312-2313.

20 See: W. Stradomski, *Ze scenariuszem czy bez...*, 'Kinotechnik' 1957, no 103, pp. 2157-2158; M. Włodarkiewicz, *Ile sekund powinno trwać jedno ujęcie*, 'Kinotechnik' 1957, no 109, pp. 2288-2289; E. Toeplitz, *Charakteryzacja w filmie amatorskim*, 'Kinotechnik' 1956, no 96, pp. 1991-1992.

21 See: L. Mokrzycki, *Po kongresie i konkursie UNICA w Rzymie*, 'Kinotechnik' 1957, no 112, pp. 2357, 2360; A. Jankowska, *Dwa dni na festiwalu krakowskim*, 'Kinotechnik' 1958, no 119, p. 2510; W. Ostrowski, *Bilans imprez katowickich*, 'Kinotechnik' 1959, no 131/2, pp. 2820-2823.

22 See: W. Stradomski, *Co kręcić?*, 'Kinotechnik' 1956, no 100, pp. 2102-2103; inż. R. Kreyser, *Temat niepopularny – film rodzinny!*, 'Kinotechnik' 1957, no 108, pp. 2267-2268; W. Stradomski, *Film za parę groszy*, 'Kinotechnik' 1959 no 133, pp. 2846-2847.

23 See: L. Rubach, *Amatorski ruch filmowy na Śląsku*, 'Kinotechnik' 1955, no 84, pp. 1704-1706; T. Rose, *Korespondencja z Anglii*, 'Kinotechnik' 1958, no 121, pp. 2560-2561.

24 See: A. Jackiewicz, *Chałupnictwo filmowe*, 'Kinotechnik' 1957, no 103, pp. 2154-2155; Prof. Jerzy Toeplitz - *o filmie amatorskim*, 'Kinotechnik' 1961, no 161, p. 3479; K.

about film previews and contests<sup>25</sup>. It is worth to mention series of interviews *Rozmowy o polskim kinie amatorskim* (Dialogues about the Polish Amateur Cinema) which have appeared in the magazine from 1961. In those articles Ryszard Kreyser interviewed more (e.g. the current minister of the transport Józef Popielas or the composer Zbigniew Turski) or less (e.g. students who brought an AK8 camera to a book fair) known amateurs about their motivations and experience in filmmaking.

The authors of those articles were frequently amateurs themselves (often engineers and journalists by profession) and mainly the most active members of the AKFs movement. Also Daniel Szczechura and Krzysztof Zanussi wrote for this magazine. They started their careers as amateurs and after some time became professional filmmakers. Although the 'Kinotechnik' had many contributors Ryszard Kreyser, Wiesław Stradomski and Wiktor Ostrowski were the most productive authors in 1955-1965. Those people were also the authors of the above-mentioned publications, which usually collected contents published in the 'Kinotechnik', and reproduced its narration. This is why it is worth to look closer at what is written in the magazine about the technical side of the amateur cinema. It could give information about the aspect of the history of amateur film movement from the communist period which is the topic of this paper.

### **The amateur filmmakers from the communist period as cinema-technicians**

The article from the 'Kinotechnik' dedicated to the 8 mm projector 'Amator' produced in Poland starts from an important comment: 'There are three central points of visits of the amateur filmmakers and the directorship of the amateur film clubs during their

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Zanussi, *Amatorom-filmowcom ku rozwadze*, 'Kinotechnik' 1965, no 200, pp. 4262-4263.

25 See: *Federacja Amatorskich Klubów Filmowych w Polsce ogłasza VI Ogólnopolski Konkurs na Film Amatorski 8mm i 16 mm na rok 1958*, 'Kinotechnik' 1958, no 114, p. 2402; *Federacja Amatorskich Klubów Filmowych wraz z Zarządem Głównym Towarzystwa Przyjaźni Polsko-Radzieckiej ogłasza III Ogólnopolski Konkurs na Film Amatorski 16 mm pod hasłem „Przyjaźń Polski ze Związkiem Radzieckim i Krajami Demokracji Ludowej”*, 'Kinotechnik' 1959, no 126, p. 2692.



frequent stays in Warsaw. The first one is the secretary's office of the Federation in Puławska 61 Street, the second one is our editorial office, ironically called the "Federation-B", finally the third one is the shop "Foto-Optyka" [Photo-Optics] in Ujazdowski Avenue 20.<sup>26</sup>

Those words confirm that 'Kinotechnik' was not only frequently read by amateurs, but also was an important organ of the consolidation of the movement. It is interesting why such a role was played by a technical magazine mostly dedicated to projectionists, especially that amateur films were not shown in cinemas frequently? One of the reasons could be completely obvious. Maybe the editorial staff of the magazine wanted to increase the amount of readers by opening this very off-stream magazine for the amateur filmmakers, a rapidly increasing movement of those days?

But probably the more important reason was that the amateur filmmakers had a lot in common with technicians and projectionists. They had to be interested and have knowledge about the equipment they were working on. Despite that the collective model of work dominated in the AKFs, as it was mentioned above, it was a rareness that a club member specialized only in the film shooting, the preparation of the lights, the film gauge developing or the editing. As well as the contemporary amateurs, those from the communist period had to know the whole process of creating a film. But what differs the present nonprofessional filmmakers from its predecessors is the level of the complexity of their work. In my opinion, in this aspect the small gauge films are closer to the professional cinema than to the materials recorded nowadays by mobile phones and edited by the software added to the standard computer equipment.

The AKFs members' focus on the technological side of the filmmaking was not only a result of the complexity of their equipment, but also its insufficiency. There was written a lot about the problem with an access to the equipment in 'Kinotechnik'. One of the main contexts in which this issue appears is the comparison of the situation of Polish and

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26 „Trzy są punkty centralne odwiedzane przez amatorów-filmowców i kierownictwo amatorskich klubów filmowych podczas ich częstych wizyt w Warszawie. Pierwszy to sekretariat Federacji przy ul. Puławskiej 61, drugim jest nasza redakcja, ironicznie nazywana «Federacją-B», wreszcie trzecim jest sklep «Foto-Optyki» w Alejach Ujazdowskich 20.”; Vostro, *Projektor 'Amator' 8mm Łódzkich Zakładów Kinematograficznych*, 'Kinotechnik' 1958, no 115, p. 2422.

foreign amateurs. In the report from the visit on UNICA, an international contest of amateur films, Lech Mokrzycki argued: 'It is important to say that a huge precipice in the area of the technique separates us from foreign films: lack of the adequate equipment – both sound and photographic, lack of good materials, lack of the additional equipment is clear as it is'<sup>27</sup>. Ryszard Kreyser described the reactions of Austrian and Czechoslovak amateurs from several clubs on the best Polish small gauge films in these words: 'They all were unanimously claiming that although they dominate over us in the technical equipment, (...) they are far behind us in the area of invention, range of problems and the artistic level of our films.'<sup>28</sup>

Problems with the accessibility of the equipment were resulted by its high prize and its lacks on the market. Access to AKFs were solving them to a certain point, since clubs gained rations of cameras, film reels as well as additional materials from the Federacja Amatorskich Klubów Filmowych (Amateur Film Clubs Federation), which was subsidized by the Ministry of Culture and Art. Therefore, Wiktor Ostrowski wrote in an article about the first nationwide contest of the technical amateur films: 'The hinder motive of the small gauge development is the fact that (...) the market hadn't been supplied by the film reel. (...) Our editorial staff is still receiving letters with complaints on this situation. We could give one advice to all our correspondents: enroll in the film clubs or create a new one'<sup>29</sup>. And Andrzej Benesz, an amateur filmmaker as well as a member of the current parliament added: 'The development of the AKFs chain makes the amateur filmmaking accessible for everyone who is willing, even for those who cannot afford to buy his or her own film camera.

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27 „Należy sobie powiedzieć przede wszystkim, że dzieli nas od filmów zagranicznych olbrzymia przepaść w zakresie techniki. Brak odpowiedniego sprzętu, zarówno dźwiękowego jak i zdjęciowego, brak dobrych materiałów, brak sprzętu pomocniczego jest tu wyraźny jak na dłoni.”, L. Mokrzycki, ..., pp. 2357, 2360.

28 „Wszyscy zgodnie twierdzili, że mimo iż górują nad nami wyposażeniem technicznym (...) są za nami daleko w tyle, jeżeli chodzi o inwencję, problematykę i poziom artystyczny naszych filmów.”, R. Kreyser, *W odwiedzinach u austriackich i czechosłowackich filmowców-amatorów*, 'Kinotechnik' 1959, no 128, p. 2736.

29 „Momentem hamującym rozwój taśmy najwęższej jest fakt, że (...) nie zaopatrzone jednocześnie rynku w taśmę filmową. (...) Redakcja nasza otrzymuje wciąż pisma ze skargami na taki stan rzeczy. Wszystkim naszym korespondentom dajemy jedną radę: zapisujcie się do klubu filmowego lub twórzcie nowe kluby.”, W. Ostrowski, *Film amatorski*, 'Kinotechnik' 1956, no 95, p. 1957.

Thanks to the clubs the multiplexing of the amount of those who can fruition their creative ambition is growing'<sup>30</sup>. However, it is worth to add that despite the Benesz's optimism, although the equipment was accessible to the club-members, it frequently didn't accede to their needs and creativity.

Not only those who were interested in creating films were joining AKFs, also the enthusiasts of the technique, who were processing and redoing cameras and projectors accessible on the market. Jan Drela was one of them: 'We introduce you our colleague Jan Drela, a worker of the Filmowe Biuro Techniczne [Film Technique Bureau], who constructed and presented to us the 16 mm projector – portable, built in a simple and proper way without the great defects even of the first rate projectors'<sup>31</sup>, as well as the amateurs from the club in Katowice:

The filmmakers from Stalinogród sacrifice a lot of the attention and time to the issues of the cinematographic technique. (...) Hence, what are they working on? Are they only training themselves? No! Their ambitions are bigger. An innovative movement has been created between them. Filmmakers from Stalinogród not only try to make colorful films, but they are also working on the technique of scoring films by using the tape recorders and even now, they are able to take a pride from its practical results. They put a lot of work, skills and ingenuity into building a model projection room<sup>32</sup>.

The members of AKFs from the period of communism were not only the amateur filmmakers, but cinema-technicians in some way, too. They had to and also wanted to be interested in the technological side of

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30 „Rozwój sieci AKF czyni film amatorski dostępnym każdemu chętnemu, nawet tym, których nie stać na kupienie sobie własnej kamery filmowej. Dzięki klubom następuje wielokrotnienie ilości tych, którzy mogą zrealizować swoje twórcze ambicje.”, R. Kreyser, *Rozmowy o polskim filmie amatorskim*, 'Kinotechnik' 1961, no 160, p. 3457.

31 „Przedstawiamy naszym Czytelnikom: kolega Jan Drela, pracownik Filmowego Biura Technicznego, skonstruował i zademonstrował nam projektor 16 mm, przenośny, zbudowany w sposób prosty i celowy, nie posiadający wielkich wad projektorów nawet najwyższej klasy.”, *Projektor Jana Dreli*, 'Kinotechnik' 1957, no 113, p. 2362.

32 „Wiele uwagi i czasu poświęcają filmowcy z WDK w Stalinogrodzie zagadnieniom techniki kinematograficznej. (...) Nad czym bowiem pracują? Czy tylko szkolą się? O nie! Ich ambicje sięgają dalej. W ich szeregach narodził się (...) ruch nowatorski. Filmowcy stalinogrodzcy nie tylko próbują robić filmy barwne, ale pracują nad techniką udźwiękowienia filmów za pomocą magnetofonu i mogą już poszczycić się realnymi wynikami. Wiele pracy, umiejętności i pomysłowości włożyli w budowę wzorowej kabiny projekcyjnej.”, L. Rubach, *Amatorski ruch filmowy na Śląsku*, 'Kinotechnik' 1955, no 84, p. 1706.

filmmaking. And the use of the equipment of those days required a much wider expert's knowledge than what has to be known by the present nonprofessional makers. Moreover, the equipment was a reason for the amateurs to enroll in the AKFs, because the prices of cameras, film reels and projectors exceeded financial abilities of an average Pole. The former club-members were not only using, but also undoing and experimenting with the equipment, adapting it to the needs of their imagination.

### **To objectify the artistic value of the amateur film**

The focus of the amateurs on the technical side of film had an influence on the way they understood the artistic values of nonprofessional cinema. In the above-mentioned report from a trip to film clubs in Austria and Czechoslovakia, Ryszard Kreyser stated that the level of Polish amateur films, its originality and artistic values, was unquestionably higher than of the foreign ones. Those kinds of opinions are cited in numerous articles from 'Kinotechnik'<sup>33</sup>, but at the same time they are almost never developed. *Spojrzenia*<sup>34</sup> by Andrzej Błasiński and Daniel Szczechura, *Regi Poloniae*<sup>35</sup> by Danuta and Jan Maćków and Stanisław Fischer, *Trzy bez atu*<sup>36</sup> by Ryszard Kreyser and Jerzy Vaulin, which were honored on many contests, as well as other appreciated amateur films, were mentioned in plenty of articles, but never widely analyzed. I haven't found in 'Kinotechnik' any interpretation of the small gauge films, or attempt to understand its phenomenon, any analysis of the specificity of Polish amateur cinema, or distinction according to

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33 „Może najbardziej zmienną rzeczą jest, że prasa polska, oprócz nas, prawie nie zainteresowała się tym potężnym wrażeniem, jakie wywołały w całym świecie amatorskim polskie filmy. – Echa kongresu w Bad Ems w prasie zachodniej”, 'Kinotechnik' 1959, no 128, p. 2738; „W przeciwieństwie do filmu amatorskiego na zachodzie Europy i w Ameryce, gdzie stanowi on jedną z rozrywek dobrze sytuowanych panów w średnim wieku uprawiających filmowanie przeważnie dla celów rodzinno-pamiątkowych w Polsce film zwany amatorskim powstał ze szczerzej miłości do sztuki filmowej, z głębokiej ciekawości dla jej tajemnic i silnego pragnienia przemawiania do innych językiem obrazów.”, W. Stradomski, *Film za parę groszy*, 'Kinotechnik' 1959, no 133, p. 2846-2847.

34 *Spojrzenia*, (1955), dir. A. Błasiński and D. Szczechura, AKF 'Kamera'.

35 *Regi Poloniae (Przemysław)*, (1957), dir. D. and J. Maćków and S. Fischer, AKF 'Śląsk'.

36 *Trzy bez atu*, (1957), dir. R. Kreyser and J. Vaulin, AKF 'Warszawa'.

trends and tendencies. The titles of the amateur films were mostly mentioned in reports from film festivals and contests, but in this kind of articles their authors were usually focusing only on the overall level of films and the general situation of the movement.

'Most of the amateurs pay too much attention to the technical issues, underestimating the intellectual and artistic aspects of amateur cinematography'<sup>37</sup>, one can read very adequately in the text *Metody oceny filmu amatorskiego*. Obviously, it is reasonable to focus on the technical rather than artistic aspects of amateur cinema in the magazine mostly dedicated to the technicians. Although, if this magazine played a significant role in the movement in the first decade of its existence and is 'ironically called "Federation-B"', it could be presumed that it had an influence on the amateurs perception of the films. And from the current perspective – also on its history.

The above-mentioned article is a good example of this problem. It presents a version of a paper of scale. "Thanks to it, it is easier to avoid the omissions and chaotic opinions about films, moreover it facilitates the estimation of the cinematographic value of work through placing it in adequate columns"<sup>38</sup>. The paper distinguishes ten categories: the first general impression, a topic/plot, a construction of contents, an image from technical point of view, soundtrack and illustrative graphics, an accuracy of realization and unique qualities. The evaluation gives between one and ten points in every criterion and the easiest mathematics decides about the selection of the triumphal film<sup>39</sup>. Although the paper of scales was designed to improve the work of many contests juries and objectify the film ratings, one can have an impression that its idea comes from the technical attitude to film. It comes from a willing to mathematically measure its artistic impressions. Fortunately, I haven't found in 'Kinotechnik' any information about implementation of this paper.

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37 „Zbyt wielu amatorów poświęca za dużo uwagi i czasu sprawom czysto technicznym, a nie docenia aspektów intelektualnych i artystycznych kinematografii amatorskiej. Metody oceny filmu amatorskiego”, 'Kinotechnik' 1958, no 119, p. 2512.

38 „Dzięki której łatwiej jest unikać przeoczeń i chaotycznych ocen filmu, oraz łatwiej jest sprecyzować wartości kinematograficzne dzieła przez umieszczenie ich w odpowiednich rubrykach”, 'Kinotechnik' 1958, no 119, p. 2511.

39 See: 'Kinotechnik' 1958, no 119, p. 2512.

## The technical amateur films

Even technological history of amateur cinema from the communist period can't be completed if it omits films. Although 'Kinotechnik' didn't specifically focus on them, one can find there some articles about different types of the small gauge cinema<sup>40</sup>. In one of them, Wiesław Stradomski indicates the typology of amateur cinema by specifying its most common topics. He distinguishes: occasional reportages, tourist and landscape films, architectural films, technical and production films, films dedicated to sport and animals<sup>41</sup>. In his book *Kręcimy film amatorski*, Stradomski presents the typology again, this time differentiating amateur cinema with: home movies, tourist and landscape films, documentaries, teaching films (educational and technical), animation and feature films<sup>42</sup>.

Even though both typologies are different to some point, they reveal that amateur cinema was a very wide phenomenon. This term was used in reference to films which followed the scheme of professional cinema (division into feature, documentary and animated films), genres connected to television (reportage), commemorative films, which showed extracts from private lives (home movies, tourist and landscape films), as well as informative films, created for education, industry or as promotion materials. Therefore, when writing the technological history of the amateur cinema from the communist period, one cannot omit technical films, which were a part of this kind of cinema.

Those films were perceived by the amateur movement exactly like every other type, despite the fact that they were made for different purposes, or that their production distinguishes them from the rest of the amateur cinema. As Wiktor Ostrowski argued:

This newest contest (...) is the first nationwide one dedicated to amateur films related to the technical issues, announced by the Naczelna Organizacja Techniczna [General

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40 See: A. Jankowska, *Film naukowy dostępny dla amatorów*, 'Kinotechnik' 1958, no 124, pp. 2636-2637; W. Ostrowski, *Amatorski film turystyczny*, 'Kinotechnik' 1961, no 157, p. 3376; R. Kreyser, *Temat niepopularny – film rodzinny!*, ..., pp. 2267-2268.

41 See: W. Stradomski, *Co kręcić?*, 'Kinotechnik' 1956, no 99, p. 2102.

42 See: W. Stradomski, *Kręcimy film amatorski*, ..., pp. 8-14.

Technical Management] (...). One has to understand that the amount of the professional films of the informative type or the popular scientific films about technology is absolutely insufficient in the era of the technical development of life. The amateur movement has a rewarding challenge here. We predict that teams of both amateur filmmakers and engineers, technicians and instructors will be created.<sup>43</sup>

Although the idea of the technical films was to produce them in cooperation with researchers and technicians, they were presented and evaluated during contests, likewise different small gauge films made by amateur filmmakers only. And during those events – as we know from the paper of scales at least – the jury was focusing mostly on the quality of realization and the artistic values. Technical and informative films were also presented during film previews, where they were enthusiastically received by the audience:

The reaction of the full cinema-room indicates that films which were shown answered the number of questions from the crowd, they fulfill the eternal people's curiosity of reaching the cases we are not aware of in our everyday life. The audience watched with bated breath the dramatic fight between phagocytes and the tuberculosis germs, masterly shown in the Japanese film 'Świat mikrobów' [The World of the Germs]; the silence, which kept in the suspense, accompanied the complicated heart surgery shown in the Soviet film 'O życiu skazanych' [About the Life of the Convicts]<sup>44</sup>.

Today it could be somehow surprising to include technical films into the area of the amateur cinema. It definitely unveils the specificity of the amateur movement of these days, which escapes easy classifications.

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43 „Najnowszy konkurs (...) to pierwszy ogólnopolski konkurs na film amatorski o tematyce technicznej, ogłoszony przez Naczelną Organizację Techniczną (...). Trzeba sobie zdać sprawę, że liczba filmów zawodowych typu instruktażowego lub popularno-naukowego z dziedziny techniki jest zupełnie niewystarczająca w dobie politechnizacji życia. Ruch amatorski ma tu wdzięczne pole do popisu. Przewidujemy tworzenie zespołów, do których z jednej strony wejdą amatorzy-filmowcy, z drugiej zaś inżynierowie, technicy i instruktorzy.”, W. Ostrowski, *Film amatorski, ...*, p. 1957.

44 „Reakcja wypełnionej po brzegi sali wskazywała, że pokazywane filmy odpowiadają na szereg stawianych sobie przez widza pytań, zaspokajają wieczną ludzką ciekawość docierania do tych spraw, których nie jesteśmy w stanie dostrzec w zwykły sposób. Widzowie z zapartym tchem śledzili dramatyczną walkę fagocytów z zarazkami gruźlicy mistrzowsko pokazaną w japońskim filmie «Świat mikrobów»; pełna napięcia cisza towarzyszyła skomplikowanym operacjom serca w trakcie wyświetlania radzieckiego filmu «O życiu skazanych».”, A. Janowska, *Film naukowy dostępny dla amatorów, ...*, p. 2636.

This type of cinema was an area for the creators who weren't trying to be professionals, but had the ambition to make films similar to those screened in cinemas. And also, for those who were simply using film to fulfill their own needs. Because of high prices of the equipment, problems with its accessibility, as well as the complicated process of its usage, which required training or at least an access to specialist publications, technical films couldn't be placed beyond the amateur movement, as I believe is today. However, they were a part of it and they also influenced this kind of cinema.

### **From the single-handed constructed camera to the 16 mm Kodak**

It wasn't my purpose in this paper to introduce the complete history of amateur cinema from the communist period. However, by the choice of a significant period of time (between 1955 and 1965 – from the beginning to the dynamic development of the AKFs movement), the medium (monthly 'Kinotechnik') and the method of interpretation (the technology), I tried to present the specificity of the amateur cinema phenomenon from those days and signalized few of its crucial aspects.

The technology plays a fundamental role in the contemporary narration about small gauge films from the communist period and it is a result of the specificity of the equipment used by amateurs. I even presume that it played as important role in the movement as the films themselves. Its usage required much higher qualifications than the nonprofessional filmmakers should have nowadays. Moreover, the access to the equipment was remarkably limited, because of its quantity in the market as well as its high prices. Development and popularity of the amateur film clubs were the results of this situation to a large degree. It is also important to remember that in this movement participated not only filmmakers, but also engineers and technicians, more interested in the usage and improvements of the equipment than in making films.

The history of the amateur movement from the communist period is a history of technology also because the narration about it omits the artistic values of small gauge films (even though Polish amateur cinema of those days was admired because of this feature). Those films were perceived in a 'technological' way because of the attempts to precisely estimate their values, as indicated the paper of scales presented in 'Kinotechnik'.



Furthermore, technological history of this type of cinema is also a consequence of the role of the technical films in the movement, which were considered as one of its most important type. It also suggests that amateur cinema of this period was a wide phenomenon.

The series *Rozmowy o polskim filmie amatorskim* presented in 'Kinotechnik' started with the article about the engineer Tadeusz Jankowski, the oldest titled amateur filmmaker, who created the first in Poland club for the small gauge cinema enthusiasts – Sekcja Filmowa (Film Section) in Polskie Towarzystwo Fotograficzne (Polish Photographical Society) in 1934. Three years later he gained the first prize and the gold medal on the Union International du Cinéma d' Amateur UNICA (International Union of Amateur Film). Asked about the beginnings of his interest in amateur cinema, he said: 'When I was a teenager I tried to construct film camera by myself. Obviously I haven't succeeded. First fine attempts into filmmaking were in 1928, when I had the 9,5mm Pathe-Baby camera. But the full success came not until 1930, when I got 16 mm Kodak camera.'<sup>45</sup>

The history of this first Polish amateur filmmaker seems symptomatic for the whole small gauge cinema from the communist period. It is a history in which the technology has its significant place. Obviously it is not a complete narration, also it is not the only one possible. Nevertheless, it is an important history, which reveals the specificity of the amateur movement.

What does it mean that the history of amateur cinema from the communist period is a history of technology? That is on the margin of the official narration about native cinema and doesn't really have a place in the handbooks of Polish cinematography. Although it is important to remember that even the amateur filmmakers frequently distanced themselves from the professional cinema, emphasizing that their movement worked on different rules than those which were obliged the professional filmmakers<sup>46</sup>. So probably the amateur cinema from the

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45 „Mając kilkanaście lat próbowałem samodzielnie skonstruować kamerę filmową co rzecz jasna zupełnie mi się nie powiodło. Pierwsze udane próby filmowania w moim życiu miały miejsce w roku 1928, miałem wówczas kamerę Pathe-Baby 9,5mm. Pełen sukces odniosłem jednak dopiero w r. 1930 po zdobyciu kamery 16 mm marki Kodak.”, R. Kreyser, *Rozmowy o polskim filmie amatorskim*, 'Kinotechnik' 1961, no 154, p. 3296.  
46 See: K. Zanussi, ..., pp. 4262-4263.

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*Cinema-technicians. The history of amateur film in the period of Polish People's Republic  
as a history of technology*

communist period history as a history of technology could be seen as a form of its specific emancipation from the narration of cinematography in which it is marginalized? But maybe it is a kind of encouragement for looking at this cinema in different way which allows to grasp its originality and specificity?

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