

Graeme Spurr: 'Post-Film/Amateur Video: The Diffusion of New Media in UK Cine Clubs', University of Glasgow.

Ph.D. theiss - abstract

The 1980s is a pivotal decade, when considering the once highly visible and vibrant amateur film club culture of the UK. These years witnessed the end of the Scottish International Amateur Film Festival, decline in club membership and vitality, and even the displacement of the film medium itself, with the arrival of domestic-level video technology in the form of betamax and VHS. Distinct feelings of loss are evident in amateur film journals of the time, whilst memories of the era among surviving practitioners are often characterised by senses of 'watershed'. This thesis counters such understanding of the 1980s, and by exploring changing nomenclatures, technologies and leisure practices in this era, begins to define a more optimistic 'post-film' period, within UK amateur film culture, where traditional cine technology begins to be supplanted by magnetic and electronic recording.

The primary research question of this project then, is whether common-sense and popular accounts of this transitory era can be countered or challenged, in favour of a positive narrative? What new possibilities, if any, are offered by video and how are amateur practice and film forms shaped by new technology?

This project seeks to collate amateur film texts (archival and internet-based) and amateur journal material (*Movie Maker*, *Making Better Movies*, *Videomaker* and *Amateur Film Maker*) in providing an alternative narrative of these developments. Emphasis will be placed on both a specific canon of amateur 'post films' identified within the holdings of the IAC Film and Video Institute Library, and by a collection of interviews with prominent amateur film-makers, whose practice has been permanently shaped by their experience of the transitions in the 1980s. Conjunctural readings of film form, technology, genre and aesthetics will be developed and illustrated through reference to this canon, with a view to extending the existing historiography of amateur film-making in the UK, from the film, to the video, to the digital era, and challenging assumptions of decline, contraction and anachronism. Questions will centre on three distinct phases of amateur cinematography and 'new' practice indexed by technological innovation; the obsolescence of film technology in the late-70s, the impact of early 3-way video systems in the 80s and the use of computer editing software in the mid-90s.

Considering the prior status and vitality of UK amateur film-making, the thesis hopes to expose a 'hidden' history of amateur film-making post film, and to promote further public and academic engagement with this 'lost' community. To this end, the thesis will provide an important examination of the transitory stage between film and new digital technologies. With a recent focus on 'digital humanities', the bridge video-technology creates, between amateur cinema's celluloid-past and digital future, remains an under-explored area. Five critical chapters are currently envisaged, interspersed with four micro-histories offering original case studies hinged around suggestive instances of post-film production.