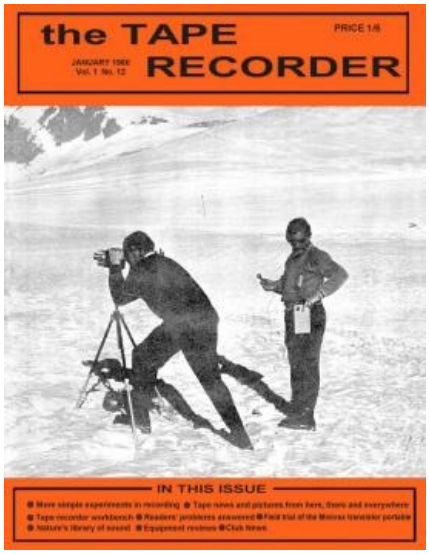
The Sound of Amateur Cinema



Lien vers la version française

Although home cinema has been practised by amateurs since the arrival of cameras on the market, academics only began to take an interest in the subject in the 1990s (Odin 1995, Zimmermann 1995). The diversity of the practice has been studied (Odin (ed.) 1999), its social organisation has been analysed, as has its economy (Creton 1999). Its use as a source for historians has been established (Ollivier 2000), and the word 'amateur' itself has also been critically examined (Stebbins 1992, Odin 1999, Bryan-Wilson and Piekut 2021). However, as the cameras available to amateurs lacked sound capabilities until the 1970s, it is generally assumed that their films were also silent. Liz Czach has detailed in particular the failure of the 16mm RCA-Victor sound camera marketed in 1935 (Czach 2018).

However, it has been shown that amateurs had a rich and varied sound recording practice (Masson 2022). “Sound hunting” was a lively pastime often practised to provide soundtracks for films. Images and sounds were recorded separately and played separately during screenings on two different formats (film for images, cylinder, disc, magnetic tape or cassette for sound). The proximity between sound hunting and amateur cinema was also present at an organisational level. The rules of the Fédération Internationale des Chasseurs de Sons, founded in 1956, were inspired by those of UNICA, the Union Internationale du Cinéma Amateur, which had existed since 1931 (and still exists today), and a personality like Jean Borel (a secondary school teacher) was at the same time a central figure in the development of sound hunting in Switzerland, one of the first secretaries of UNICA, and one of the founders of the Cinémathèque de Lausanne.

However, while studies exist on amateur cinema (Zimmermann 1995, Shand 2008, Craven 2009, Turquety and Vignaux 2017) and on amateur sound recording (Bijsterveld 2004, Masson 2020, Masson 2022), the sound of amateur films has so far been little studied (Wurlitzer 2012), and the links between amateur cinema and amateur sound recording little explored.

This conference will seek to reconcile technical, cultural and archival approaches:

- equipment: technique and practice
- the sound of amateur cinema: historical, aesthetic, sociological and anthropological interest
- amateur film sound archives: archiving, heritage and restoration

Among the themes that may be addressed:

The sound of amateur cinema:

- methods, tools and practices for recording sound
- sound effect discs, tapes and cassettes: history and use
- economic history of amateur sound cinema
- history of direct sound

Sound and image synchronisation :

- which processes for which results?
- projection methods, tools and practices
- in France, Charles Vaast systems and devices were commonly used by amateurs to synchronise sound and image, were there others? And what about abroad?

Places of practice and knowledge:

- where and how did people learn about amateur cinema, particularly the sound side?
- what links were there between film clubs, recording clubs, radio clubs?
- French and Swiss sound hunters were regularly hired for radio contracts (Masson 2022). What about amateur filmmakers? Were there similar bridges with television and cinema?

Amateur film sound recorders:

- direct-engraving disc, magnetic tape, cassette: history of sound devices, history of manufacturers, history of media.
- are there any sources documenting the use of cylinder phonographs to produce amateur sound cinema?
- 8, 16 and 35 mm magnetic film: equipment, performance, use, manufacturers, history

- were amateurs themselves at the origin of technological developments?

Collecting memories, gestures and techniques, in sound and image:

- at what point does the need arise to add image to sound or sound to image to capture stories, celebrations, private and public events? Do these appear differently depending on the medium that captures them?

- the absence of sound-image synchronisation can lead to the use of a commentary to illustrate and explain the images. Are there specific ways of writing commentaries (for example, influenced by professional documentaries or by any advice given in amateur film magazines and manuals, etc.)?

- amateurs as collectors of local history

The sound archives of amateur cinema :

- what corpus for amateur film sound? In France, regional film libraries preserve rich sound collections. Are there other places where sound is collected and preserved? What is the situation abroad?

- amateur film sound archives as a source for research into history, sociology, anthropology, aesthetics and artistic creation.

The restoration of amateur film sound archives:

- noise, its importance and its contextual and media-referential meanings.

- the influence of current technologies and habits (image definition and cleanliness, digital silence, width of the sound spectrum, etc.), on the apprehension of films from the past

- restoration ethics

In addition to scientific papers, the symposium will include round tables with amateur filmmakers and sound recordists, demonstrations of equipment (projection, synchronisation, restoration), screenings of amateur sound films and sound naps based on amateur sound archives.

Deadline for proposals:

6 September 2024

Submission requirements:

250-word abstract accompanied by a 100-word biography sent to Jean-Baptiste Masson : jean-baptiste.masson [at] univ-rennes2.fr (jean-baptiste[dot]masson[at]univ-rennes2[dot]fr)

For further enquiries:

- Jean-Baptiste Masson (jean-baptiste.masson [at] univ-rennes2.fr (jean-baptiste[dot]masson[at]univ-rennes2[dot]fr)), PhD in History, Univeristy of York, post-doctoral researcher, Marie Skłodowska-Curie / Bienvenüe fellow, Université Rennes-2, research fellow, Cinémathèque de Bretagne.

- Roxane Hamery (roxane.hamery [at] univ-rennes2.fr (roxane[dot]hamery[at]univ-rennes2[dot]fr)), professor, Université Rennes-2.

Scientific committee:

Stéphanie Ange (Diazinteregio, Ofnibus), Anne Gourdet-Marès (Fondation Jérôme Seydoux-Pathé), Julie Guillaumot (Bibliothèque Nationale de France), Roxane Hamery (Université Rennes-2), Sébastien Layerle (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle), Alan Lozevis (Cinémathèque de Bretagne), Jean-Baptiste Masson (Université Rennes-2, Cinémathèque de Bretagne), Vanessa Nicolazic (PhD, ATER, Université Grenoble-Alpes), Nicolas Noguès (Cinémathèque de Bretagne), Louis Pelletier (Université de Montréal), Giusy Pisano (ENS Louis-Lumière), Gaïd Pitrou (Cinémathèque de Bretagne), Mirco Santi (Home Movies), Vincent Sorrel (Université Grenoble-Alpes), Stéphane Tralongo (Université de Lausanne), Benoît Turquéty (Université Paris-8), Caroline Zéau (Université Paris Cité).

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