

THE UNSEEN PART

Catherine Roudé – Summer 2006. I start in Paris my university classes in history of cinema. I own a DVD of the Medvedkine groups. At that time, I already know about the work of Chris Marker but have not yet discovered its political contents. I also know little about French activist cinema collectives. Even less about the cooperation between filmmakers and workers in Besançon and Sochaux between 1968 and 1974. Learning that movie makers trained workers to shoot their own movies and seeing the result on the Medvedkine groups DVD, that is, interesting films on formal and political grounds, really motivated me to understand how it could be possible. This is what prompted me to work on that subject.

Starting the microhistory of Slon/Iskra, the goal was to understand what activist cinema was after the events of May 1968. This meant analyzing how the collective was born and how it evolved, who worked there and how, its connections to political parties and unions. For Slon/Iskra, a lot of archive was kept, allowing me to write that history. Production documents, letters, photos are there to complement the actual movies. Sociology of art focuses on analyzing any work of art through social ties emerging from it. We can really understand a movie only when considering everything that led to its making and screenings. Even more when usual production processes are bypassed within a collectivist and activist context. In addition, activities of activist cinema go beyond production. Multiple support actions are taking place. Like sending film to a Chilean director during Popular Unity, lending a movie camera or an editing table to another collective, distributing a film, and so on.

Moreover, I needed to go deeper than only the archives from the production company and dig towards private or institutional archive related to Slon/Iskra. I could also interview numerous people whose words are essential to recent history. These two main sources need to be thoroughly cross-referenced. Of course interviews, based on personal experience and memories but also archive documents that contain many pitfalls such as forged or backstated documents. Chris Marker said something that perfectly illustrates historians' work: "A movie has two things in common with an iceberg. With time there is less and less of it and its unseen part is larger than its emerged one." It is up to us historians to pull to the surface as much unseen part of history as possible.

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