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For the 7th Art. First Notes about Cinema in Serbia

Abstract:

The concern of this paper is to explore and analyse the (early) writings about early cinema in Serbia in order to point out the ways these essays define the nature of cinema, notion of national cinema and importance or need for writing about the phenomenon of “moving images”. The very identification of the early writings in Serbia demands great tolerance and openmindedness since the body of texts encompasses very few titles that fit the contemporary definition of theoretical texts and large number of essays, critiques etc. that get the theoretical aura only if carefully placed in the (interpretative) local context of the period.

The first film essays are written by journalist and professors that saw the early cinema as interesting technical innovation with the scientific and educational value and purpose (Pavle Vujic, 1896; Zarko Ognjanovic, 1910; Grgur Beric, 1913). The second line of rethinking was consonant with and influenced by the theories of French and Italian avant-garde. Writing about cinema became almost obligatory “social game” for intelligentsia or people of literature educated abroad (They could be labeled as second generation of intellectuals in the European fringes and periphery with near colonial status and accordingly fit the theories of Edward Said, Bhabha or Roy Armes). These texts are signed by great avant-garde names like Tokin (Zenithism), Buli (Hipnism), Aleksic (Dadaism) or Marko Ristic (Surrealism). The paper focuses on the particular group of their writings with both metacinematic and metatheoretical concern. Their essays analyze the nature of cinema (Tokin, 1920; Ristic: *First Notes about Cinema/Prve beleške o filmu*, 1924); question the concept of national cinema and the “genre” of city film as opposed to the reigning narrative of “royal exoticism” or “national historical spectacle” (Aleksic in the eclectically intoned and entitled essay *Belgrade, Cinema, Cinematic Belgrade and Belgrade’s Film/Beograd, film, Filmski Beograd i Beogradski film* from 1929 ecstatically concludes *Film is part of life, Film is body in movement*) and eventually systematize the writings about cinema and films (Vane Zivadinovic Bor: *Introduction to Film Critique/Uvod u kritiku filma*, 1934; or Dragan Acimovic who asks the fundamental question Dragan Acimovic: *Do We Need Writings about Cinema?/ Treba li kod nas pisati o filmu?* in the introductory chapter of the 1939 book *For the Seventh Art/Za sedmu umetnost*).

The late dating of these – from mid teens to thirties - texts as the earliest examples of film theory and serious dealing with the number of issues of early cinema - is explained by the traditional Serbian/Balkan jet lag of fifteen years or so in comparison with Europe. Accordingly the fact of jet lag allows the placement of particular emphasis upon reflection of European spirit on the local context; on the way European tradition was adopted and adapted/aculturated (and creolized) to the specific notion of early cinema in Serbian national context.