COMMUNICATION & SOCIETY

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Film Clubs and Film Cultural Policies in Spain and the GDR around 1960

Abstract
This study provides a contrastive analysis of the film cultures in Francoist Spain and the German Democratic Republic in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the context of this period of classic cinephilia, the article focuses on the institutional position of film clubs and on their function as 'places of negotiation' in which different forces and interests collided: more or less independent film activists acted within, against, or parallel to state organizations trying to implement certain cultural activities and discourses. The arguments are based on broad archival material from Spain and Germany (*Archivo General de la Administración*, *Bundesarchiv Berlin* etc.) and, specifically, on the analysis of two of these institutions in Barcelona and Leipzig. The initial hypothesis holds that in their reactions to these institutions, the Spanish and East German states present two different conceptions of state cultural policies (authoritarian and totalitarian). At the same time, the activities of the clubs (screenings, discussions, edition of magazines) can also be read as part of a broader attempt to redefine the film-cultural field along three axes (time, place and status), connecting them to other European film cultures of the time and enabling us to widen and differentiate the analysis of classical cinephilia within a broader international context.

Keywords
Film culture, cinephilia, film clubs, Spain, GDR, cultural policies

1. Introduction[1]

This study offers a contrastive analysis of the film cultures in Francoist Spain and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the late 1950s and

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[1] A first draft of this text was discussed at the *Seminario de Historia del Instituto Ortega y Gasset* in Madrid. I thank the participants for their interest, commentaries und suggestions.

early 1960s. In the context of this era of classic cinephilia, the article focuses on the institutional position of film clubs and on their function as 'places of negotiation' in which different cultural and political interests and discourses collided, especially those organized on the one hand around the individual initiative of film aficionados and on the other around the institutions that structured the cultural policies in both of these countries.

The initial hypothesis of this article holds that both examples should allow us to illustrate and categorize the differences between a *totalitarian* and an *authoritarian* conception of the state's cultural policy. While in the case of the GDR cultural work was organized hierarchically and based on a discourse of great homogeneity (employing such phrases as the "new socialist man", the "positive hero" or Socialist Realism as the doctrine and artistic 'method'), in the Spanish scenario the cultural policy of this period was based on an authoritarian premise of control and influence that was capable of censuring, punishing and defining some taboo subjects and practices but at the same time was not interested in (or was simply incapable of) proposing an homogenizing and widely accepted cultural narrative – especially among younger generations. The role of film clubs and their position in the cultural field are only two film-cultural examples among many others that would further characterize the differences between both countries. These can be found for instance in the discourse of specialized publications or in the way cultural policies aimed to control film schools and festivals.

This analysis seeks to write cinema history from the perspective of its reception and places itself in a specific line of research that since the 1980s (often under the designation *New Film / Cinema History*)[2] has pointed to the necessity of a film historiography that clearly goes beyond a story of cinema's most relevant achievements, of its masterpieces and auteurs – a historiography open to new kinds of sources and to new methodological and interdisciplinary approaches. By focusing on the GDR and Spain, this study also chooses a comparative approach to this 'history of film cultures'. It is based on a national interpretative framework that gains true significance within an international context. In this regard, this study concentrates on the circulation and reception processes and the reinterpretation given to general phenomena (certain ways of watching films, of generating discourses in new contexts) and thus positions itself close to studies on "cultural transfer".[3] Cultural exchange with other countries – for instance France – is not a central focus of the article however; nor are the cinematographic relationships between Spain and the GDR – which were rachitic anyway in the period under analysis.

The first part of this study analyzes the position of the film clubs within the framework of the state's cultural policies in both countries. These reflections on their position and function are initially of a general nature; in the second and third part, they will be illustrated with some examples of two of the most significant institutions, founded in Barcelona and Leipzig in 1951 and 1956 respectively. The last part before the conclusion systematizes the function of film clubs and contextualizes their position in a broader framework by also taking into account the discourses of specialist magazines[4] along three axes (status, time and

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[2] See for example, as the first general text on this phenomenon, Elsaesser (1986). Richard Maltby (2011) offers a general overview of the historiographical evolution during recent decades and explains the differences between a New *Film* and New *Cinema* History. For a systematization of the principles of this *New Film History*, and their analysis as a *Kuhnian* paradigm shift in film historiography, see Kusters (1996).

[3] See Middell (2000).

[4] Good examples of the cinephilian renaissance in these years are the founding of *Die Deutsche Filmkunst* (1953), *Der Filmagitator* (1952), *Der Filmkurier* (1957), *Der Filmspiegel* (1954), *Materialien zur Filmwissenschaft*, previously known as *film-wissenschaftliche mitteilungen* (1960) as well as *Film* (1964) in the GDR. In Spain, *Objetivo* (1953), *Cinema Universitario* (1955), *Cine-Club* (1956), *Documentos Cinematográficos* (1960), *Cinestudio* (1961) and *Nuestro Cine* (1961) reflect a similar trend.

space) which, as this article hypothesizes, structured the process of cinephilian cultural differentiation in those years.

2. Cinephilia and Film Clubs

The 1950s was a time in which a lasting film culture flourished and established itself in different European countries, a cultural episode traditionally known as classic cinephilia. This came with a new way of watching films, talking about them and spreading this discourse, according to the rather imprecise definition provided by Antoine de Baecque of a phenomenon he saw in its French variation from 1944 to 1968.[5] In an attempt to categorize this first broad definition, we can trace this rebirth of a film culture back to the emergence of a new generation (those *enfants de la cinémathèque* of Henri Langlois, although this definition could be extended to those passionate film fans born around 1930), to the appearance of central institutions (such as the film clubs or the new specialist periodicals),[6] new discourses (characterized by a growing systematization, politicization and theorization of the cinematic debate) or even legal dispositions (aimed at supporting the first works of new filmmakers). Those changes would modify the social and artistic consideration of cinema as a whole: those were the years when the "politique des auteurs" sought to equate commercial filmmakers with artists, the years when cinema gained relevance as a discursive arena for debates on politics and the foundations were laid for its subsequent academic recognition. This "ideological coup de force" (Mary, 2006: 16f.) in the cinematographic field prepared the ground for and then accompanied a new renaissance of the medium, the New Cinemas: in France, the most visible example of this cinematographic *modernity* was the emergence of the French New Wave, the *Nouvelle Vague*.

These various examples and references show how the analysis of this phenomenon has traditionally focused on France, the cinephilian paradigm par excellence. However, cinephilian cultural practices were part of a transnational phenomenon that, notwithstanding all the necessary adjustments and adaptations, can be observed in different European countries. By focusing on Spain and the German Democratic Republic this study pursues two objectives: on the one hand, I am especially interested in contrasting two examples which are very different from the French model, two countries in which a strong censorship regime was in force and in which the international cultural exchange was extremely restricted and controlled. On the other hand, I also analyze different reactions to this cinephilian renaissance manifested in the two countries' cultural policies.

The touchstone in this case will be the situation of the film club movement around 1960, a period in which it had already reached a certain level of maturity in both contexts. Although the foundation of film clubs (in their different denominations such as *ciné-clubs*, *Filmklubs*, *film societies*) was part of an early (proto)cinephilian phase around the classic avant-gardes of the 1920s, their golden age would come with the renaissance of international film culture after WWII. Film clubs emerged as places for the screening of films neglected by commercial distribution companies, as an open forum for discussion and dialogue with a clear educational function. At the same time, from the very outset they were

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[5] De Baecque, (2003, 11). In the field of cinema history and theory, the study of cinephilia has usually been addressed from two perspectives: first, one centered on the fascination with cinema, independently of historical and geographical barriers, such as in the study by J. Rosenbaum and A. Martin (2003). This can refer to such different phenomena as the Parisian film clubs of the 1950s or a contemporary video installation, and second, a more precise approach that understands cinephilia as a cultural phenomenon deeply intertwined with the historical and political circumstances surrounding its emergence. De Baecque's approach is a good example of this second perspective and one of the points of departure for this text.

[6] In France the number of film clubs grew from in 1947 to 180 by the mid-50s (Neupert, 2002: 34); the *Cahiers du cinéma* were founded in 1951, followed just one year later by *Positif*. These would become the two most relevant journals of this period of classic cinephilia.

central organizations in the process of the institutionalization of film culture. They claimed a special status for themselves based on their accumulation of cultural capital. Particularly in dictatorial regimes, this special status would allow them to gain political relevance. Structurally, film clubs were generally the result of individual *bottom up* initiatives while at the same time they became the subject of state interest – especially in the political contexts analyzed here – aimed at controlling or exploiting their function (*top down*). This double dynamic may allow us to focus our attention on the national variations of an 'institutional cinephilia' and the particularities of the cultural policies in both dictatorships.

In Spain, the film club tradition was sparked in the late twenties and experienced its first boom during the years of the Second Republic (1931–1936). After the civil war, and during the first years of the dictatorship, it kept growing mainly around those institutions directly promoted by the regime or related to it in Madrid[7] and some provincial capitals such as Valladolid, Salamanca or Zaragoza[8]. As in the early 1950s, an early, foundational film club revival began to change the local film culture; most of its representatives were integrated into the two institutions that would structure the film club activities during subsequent years: the Catholic Church and the Movement's Students' Syndicate, *SEU* (Palacio, 2006). A series of important changes in both institutions were decisive for the rapid growth of the film clubs (24 came to a first national gathering in Madrid's cultural stronghold *Ateneo* in 1952; their number would increase rapidly).

The first of these changes brings us back to an episode that took place within an institution that, up to this point, had not been particularly open towards cinema. The Catholic Church began to rethink its generally condemnation of cinema following the congress organized by the international Catholic Film Office (OCIC) in Brussels in 1947, where this institution raised the need for more active intervention by the Church in different aspects of the film world. Over the next few years, production, distribution, exhibition, essays and film journalism would turn to essential fields in the propagandistic work of the Catholic Church.[9] At the same time, and while since 1951 responsibility had mostly lain with the General Direction for Cinematography and Theater (*Dirección General de Cinematografía y Teatro*) under the thumb of the ultra-Catholic *hardliner* Gabriel Arias-Salgado and his Ministry of Information and Tourism, an important film culture flourished around the *SEU* and profited from the cultural reforms promoted by Joaquín Ruiz-Giménez in his Ministry of Education between 1951 and 1956. Some *SEU* clubs founded around this time (in Salamanca, Barcelona, Zaragoza or Madrid) would become the protagonists of the Spanish film club movement during the next fifteen years. From 1955 onwards, these institutions were also free from central censorship. The films had to be controlled by the provincial delegates of the *Ministry for Information and Tourism* before their screening however. The *SEU* also tried to provide copies of films and founded a new magazine *ex profeso* between 1956 and 1958: *Cine-Club*. The financing provided by the *SEU*, although never enough from the perspective of the activists, was not unsubstantial – especially considering that most of the clubs without *SEU* affiliation lacked the bare minimum required to offer an interesting program. If we focus our attention on the academic year of 1957/58, the *SEU* film club at the Universidad de Salamanca, one of the most relevant in the country, received 8,000 pesetas from the General Direction of Information (*Dirección General de Información*), 8,000 from the *Jefatura Nacional del SEU* and 10,000 from the

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[7] For example, the first *SEU* film club in Madrid, the film club of the Círculo Cinematográfico Español (CIRCE) or the one at the Círculo de Escritores Cinematográficos.
[8] According to the testimony of Hernández Marcos and Ruiz Butrón (1978: 33), authors of the only monograph on the Spanish film club movement.
[9] Regarding the Spanish case, see Heredero (1993: 50f.) or Martínez-Bretón (1987).

Jefatura del Distrito Universitario del SEU. That amounted to 26,000 Pesetas, around a quarter of the institution's total income (110,433 pesetas)[10].

The *SEU* also opened up some of its publications (*Juventud*, *La Hora*) to people coming from this emerging cinephilian subculture and promoted publications such as *Cine-Club* (1956) or *Cinema Universitario*, which appeared in 1955 at the film club in Salamanca and would become one of the reference titles for Spanish aficionados until its closure in 1963. As Falangism started to lose relevance in university circles[11], film clubs would provide new generations, within the evident material and ideological limitations of the day, with a place to articulate a dissident cultural alternative. By way of example: in the early 1950s Manuel Rabanal Taylor was a member of the banned Spanish Communist Party *PCE* but also subdirector at the *SEU* film club in Barcelona before he took on the *SEU* film club in Madrid in 1953. A year later, he was already heading the *SEU's Servicio Nacional de Cine* (*National Cinema Service*), from where he coordinated the film club activity of the Student's Syndicate. In this regard, growing interest of the *PCE* after 1953 in the cultural and intellectual spheres would influence the trajectory of certain individuals in the film-cultural field, especially those around the film production company UNINCI, at the national film school (*Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cinematográficas*), at the specialized publications (cultural journals like *Índice* or film magazines such as *Objetivo*, *Cinema Universitario* or *Nuestro Cine*) or in the film clubs. However, apart from the magazine *Objetivo*, which was created in 1953 upon the initiative of the party, it seems that despite the important presence of the communist activists in the cinematic field (see in this case the role of Ricardo Muñoz-Suay from the early 1950s on in Riambau, 2007), the party did not possess a strategy for the coordination of all these different areas[12].

Notwithstanding this institutional affiliation to the Catholic Church and the *SEU*, there was also a lack of a clear strategy aimed at exploiting the existence of the film clubs for the interest of the regime and its cultural policies. The constitution process of the *National Film Club Federation* around 1957 dragged on for more than a year due to the conflicts among Catholic and *SEU* film clubs. It would only be after its foundation, which was actively endorsed by the former (1951–1952) and future (1962–1967) General Director for Cinematography and Theater José María García Escudero, that the General Direction started to keep a record of the film club activities in an Official Registry (*Registro Oficial de Cineclubs*). Incidentally, many of the clubs would ignore the requests from the General Direction well into the sixties[13]. Regardless of the Registry, the DGCT also tried to determine the exact number of film clubs and therefore issued some 'circulars' (*Oficios Circulares*) to the regional representatives of the ministry. The outcome is quite surprising: it found many more as initially expected, 346 clubs, although it is difficult to specify how many of these institutions were active[14]. The figures also showed a rather complex picture of the film-cultural accomplishments. Under the unclear designation 'film club' we find many different intermittent initiatives, without perseverance or a clear purpose, together with other

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[10] "Resumen de actividades de la VI Temporada del Cine-Club" in AGA Box 20941 TOP. 22/79–74 Fomento Cine.

[11] Rodríguez Tejada (2015ç: 85f.). For a more general approach on the role played by the *SEU* and its evolution during these years, see Ruíz Carnicer, 1998.

[12] In the Historical Archive of the *PCE* there is no evidence of coordinated action in the field of culture and film. Some interviews conducted with then members of the party such as Eduardo Ducay or Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón also confirm the absence of a coordinated effort in this regard. See also Prieto Souto, 2013.

[13] AGA Box 20941 TOP. 22/79–74 Fomento Cine.

[14] The magazine *Film Ideal* (no. 43) speaks of 250 clubs in 1960. Hernández Marcos and Ruiz Butrón (1978: 89), on the basis of the information kept by the Federation, talk of just 107 at the end of that year; according to the activity reports kept by the *Dirección General de Cinematografía y Teatro* in the early 1960s, the figures are clearly higher. However, it is still difficult to determine how many of them were active at the time. AGA Boxes 20940, 20941, 20943 and especially 15596. Hernández Marcos and Rodríguez Brutón estimate there were 244 by the end of the 1960s.

organizations with an almost para-official character (for example, the Cine-Club Madrid, whose members included some of the representatives of the cinematographic intelligentsia of the regime) as well as ideologically dissident film clubs and others without any clear political aspirations.

The German film club tradition also went back to the 1920s, a time characterized by clear ideological lines: the socialist and communist parties, as well as their various bedfellows, were behind the most relevant film-cultural initiatives of this period. However, the film culture emerging after the foundation of the new state, the socialist German Democratic Republic in 1949, had to start almost from scratch. For instance, it was not until 1956 that a first group of film clubs was founded. However, since 1951–52 there had already been a first attempt to influence film reception through the *Filmaktivs*, a short-lived project of cultural agitation connected to the characteristics of a centralized cultural policy that had been taking shape from 1946 onwards (see Bathrick, 2015). After subsequent processes that led to the nationalization of the production, distribution and the larger part of the exhibition, the emergence of the *Filmaktivs* can be interpreted as the intent to also control cinematographic reception. From 1956 on however, the film clubs would question this totalitarian approach to the film-cultural work.

Up to this point, the authorities of the ruling Socialist Unity Party (*SED*) regarded the tradition of independent but also organized film audiences with great distrust: it considered the film clubs to be the result of a movement 'from below', and merely an extension of the previous work of film enthusiasts but without an ideological basis. Thus when film clubs tried to implement their projects with screenings and discussions, they were forced to do so within the existing institutional framework: independent associations, like those already existing in other countries of the Eastern Bloc such as Poland – which also served as a model for local cinephiles –, were not permitted in the GDR. Institutions such as universities, the mass state youth organization Free German Youth (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*, *FDJ*), the Society for German-Soviet Friendship (*Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft*, *GDSF*), the East German Army (*Nationale Volksarmee*), or the Cultural League (*Kulturbund*) would become the main providers of institutional (and quite frequently physical) space for the club activities in subsequent years. The explicit ban on independent associations, at least *de jura*, constitutes a difference from the Spanish case. However, in practice, and after the integration of the clubs into the pre-existing parastatal structures (the Catholic Church, the *SEU*, the *FDJ*, universities), the differences between both countries are barely relevant.

Unlike in the Spanish case, apart from the problems regarding their institutional affiliation, the film clubs in the GDR posed other challenges to the official cultural policy. By focusing on artistically valuable films, they pointed indirectly to a deficiency in film-cultural education that was typically not acknowledged by the officials. In the eyes of the state authorities, film clubs (especially those around the universities) represented an elitist, unmanageable approach to film reception; they were organizations unwilling to engage with the principles of the new state's proletarian aesthetics (usually summarized under the aesthetic-ideological potpourri of unclear definition but proven propagandistic value termed "Socialist Realism") due to a preference for traditional, 'bourgeois' cultural forms. Eberhard Richter, a press aide to the Ministry of Culture, published an article in *Forum*, the official weekly newspaper of the *FDJ*, summarizing the official *SED* line on the existence of film clubs:

> We consider that a student film club, as an independent organization, is not necessary. The task of the film clubs in the western countries is to make artistically valuable films accessible to the public. In the German Democratic Republic there are no barriers to prevent the screening of artistically valuable films. (Richter, 1956)

In spite of such opinions, and following discussions of the Central Committee of the *SED* between 21 and 27 October 1955, the *FDJ* had already voiced criticism of the party's bureaucratic structures, citing its distance from the real problems and needs of young people. It also campaigned for the creation of special interest groups and associations that would re-establish a strong sense of cultural boundaries. It was in the spaces created between the different 'sensibilities' within the monolithic state cultural policies that the clubs would find their place. Just several months later, at the Twelfth Conference of the Central Committee of the *FDJ* in February 1956, the organization opted for increased cooperation with cultural and sports groups. The founding of six film clubs during the subsequent months can therefore be interpreted as part of the state authorities' efforts to promote a closer relationship to youth in general and university students in particular (Becker & Petzold, 2001: 396)[15]. From an ideological perspective, the special status their members aspired to (such as when they sought exemption from censorship dispositions) would pose continuous problems in the following years. The position of the government is clear in this regard: granting privileges to the clubs would imply questioning the new state's egalitarian aspirations. However, the state would turn a blind eye through the years to the screening of films not belonging to the socialist canon. Through the *FDJ* it would provide for the maintenance of the clubs at the universities: it would finance them, while at the same time, as we can observe in some case studies (Ramos Arenas, 2015: 327), it would control the ideological orientation of their members.

Despite this original difference, in both countries in the early 1960s we find a film club network in a diffuse 'grey area': they were legal institutions, more or less tolerated but not directly promoted by the state. Nor was there a plan to politically exploit their existence. However, those clubs situated around the universities, where both states (still) believed to be educating and formatting the regime's future (supposedly loyal) elites, would enjoy greater rights. Their relevance within a certain area of the cultural field would depend on their capability to use the opportunities offered by the different (para)statal organizations competing for a place of privilege in this field.

3. From Barcelona to Leipzig: Case Studies

We have already observed how from the mid-1950s onwards the university film clubs enjoyed a special status that ensured special, if not always officially acknowledged, treatment regarding censorship as well as access to publications. However, it is perhaps the film club Monterols, founded in 1951 by the students at the university residence ('*Colegio Mayor*') of the same name in Barcelona in 1951 and without any connection to the *SEU* that illustrates this phenomenon most clearly. From its early years, the film club organized cycles and conferences, invited film directors and researchers to participate and was capable of offering an innovative and quality program[16] clearly superior to those of many other national film clubs. In 1957 it organized a 'course of cinematic initiation' (*Curso de iniciación cinematográfica*) that extended its influence among Barcelona schools such as the *Escuelas Pías* and *San Miguel* (Caparrós Lera, 2000: 50). The same year, the film club started the first significant Spanish film book collection, published by *Rialp*. All these activities,

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[15] See also the documents in the Bundesarchiv Berlin: BArch DY 24/24355 y BArch DY 24 Zentralrat der Freien Deutschen Jugend referring to the creation of Youth Film Clubs.
[16] Although I cannot embark here upon a detailed analysis of the programs at Monterols (kept in the Box AGA 15590), it is worth pointing out, as proof of the quality of works offered by this institution, the list of films screened during the *Primer Curso Cinematográfico* between 30 January and 8 April 1956. It included, among others, films like *Jeux Interdits* (R. Clement, 1952), *Europa 51* (R. Rossellini, 1952), *Rashomon* (A. Kurosawa, 1950), *The River* (J. Renoir, 1951), *Bicycle Thieves* (V. de Sica, 1948), *Metropolis* (F. Lang, 1927), *Bienvenido Mr. Marshall* (L. G. Berlanga, 1953) and even some scenes from S. Eisenstein's classic *October* (1928).

already noteworthy in their own right, gain additional significance if we take into account that the university residence, as well as the film club or *Rialp*, belonged to Opus Dei and must be considered part of the broader alignment of this organization in different sectors of Spanish cultural, political and economic spheres. Madrid's *Ateneo* was a private cultural institution directed from 1951 on by Florentino Pérez Embid, a prominent member of Franco's state and a member of Opus Dei, and from the mid-1950s on offered the pages of its renowned publication *La Estafeta Literaria* to some of the members of Monterols. José María Otero or Jorge Grau wrote film criticism for the publication, and in doing so they laid the foundations for a certain type of aesthetic discourse (based on the vindication of color film and a *cahierist* defense of the *mise en scène* and the *auteur* as one of their main critical principles) which would continue after the foundation of *Documentos Cinematográficos* in 1960, a short-lived (only three-year) but very relevant journal within the national film culture (see Nieto Ferrando, 2009).

One could also point out that the film club Monterols was, due to its means and the quality of its cultural offer, an exception among the national film club network – and that is true. But this is also a very telling exception, since it points to the existence of a certain heterogeneity within the cultural field. A heterogeneity from which certain institutions would temporarily benefit. Some of them, as in the case of the journal *Cinema Universitario*, would even put into practice some initiatives which were, if not openly anti-establishment, clearly dissenting, and would serve to sustain the relative autonomy of a cinephilian subculture.

In the GDR, the *SED's* primacy in the cultural sphere, usually channeled through associations such as the *FDJ*, would make similar initiatives more complicated. Even the Leipzig University Film Club, which belonged to a first wave of film club foundation in 1956 and in subsequent years would become one of the central institutions in the film-cultural field of the GDR, initially had to operate within the narrow institutional framework granted by the state party. As of 1962, and after having reactivated the club, a new administrative team implemented a new kind of (more alternative) program and launched some initiatives such as the establishment of a national Film Club Association (*AG Filmclubs*) and the publication of a magazine (*Film*) from 1964 onwards. However, these would often have to take place on the individual level (based on the contact networks of its members) and (semi-) clandestinely.

At the same time, and in spite of the lack of interest in their activities, the cultural authorities implicitly recognized the special status of the film clubs that sustained their partial autonomy. Indeed, the clubs provide a good example of the paternalist approach behind the censorship regulations in both regimes that questioned the idea of censorship as a monolithic control system. Instead, we find a quantitative and qualitative adaptation of censorship policies according to the target audiences that would mainly benefit the work of university film clubs: small groups of spectators such as those at film clubs, film schools or festivals would have access to films in better conditions than the broad mass of viewers in commercial cinema[17]. Apart from that, certain 'better' audiences (better in the sense that they were better educated and/or loyal in the eyes of the authorities, like the university students) would enjoy access to certain content that was denied to the majority of the population.

University film clubs were a minority in both countries (if we consider those dependent on the Catholic Church in Spain or factories or cultural organisms in the GDR); however, if

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[17] Groups such as film festivals or film club circles, but also the institutional network provided by the foreign cultural institutes are richly discussed in the volume recently published by Monterde and Piñol (2015) on the reception of the New Cinemas in Spain.

we take into account their programs, their activities or their publications, they were the most relevant. They saw themselves as the young avant-garde – and were treated as such by the state. They represented the fusion of the most passionate sections of the film culture (young, urban, active and mainly male) with the cultural policy of a state that tried to channel the activities and interests of those it considered its future elites.

Apart from influencing the activities of the film clubs, this double differentiation (based on the quantity and quality of the potential audience) would also be behind the foundation of the 'art cinemas' in the GDR (Filmkunsttheater) in 1959 as well as the emergence of the *Salas de Arte y Ensayo* y *Salas Especiales* in Spain in 1967. If we search further and include for instance other pillars of cinephilian life such as the specialist magazines, this leads us to interesting considerations. The specialized discourse, particularly that spread by publications addressing a cultivated minority – like *Cinema Universitario*, published by the *SEU* film club in Salamanca from 1955 onwards, or *Film*, the "half-illegal" (Gehler, 2012: 27) organ of the East German Film Club Association founded in 1964 – could put the accent on a critique of state censorship, on the unseen films, on the disconnection from international contemporary trends in film production and debate, or on the problems in cultural supply. Regarding such aspects as their staff or discourses, such publications were more closely related to minority culture journals (both published around 2000 copies of each issue) than to the traditional glossy film magazines. In these cases, the minority position was negotiated in return for a certain autonomy and freedom of speech within the broader cultural sphere. However, that this autonomy was controlled and that its borders were narrower than many of the protagonists had eventually come to believe became clear in 1963 (in Spain) and 1968 (in the GDR) at the latest, when these publications were banned.

4. Films, Development of a Program: The Achilles' Heel of the Film Clubs

The collaboration with other kinds of institutions was a necessity not only from an institutional point of view: film club activities relied to a large extent on formal and informal contacts with cultural organizations capable of providing the films necessary for the screenings. The State Film Archive, founded in East Berlin in 1955 with the film copies originally belonging to the *Reichsfilmarchiv*, which had just spent ten years in Moscow as part of the war booty confiscated by the Red Army in 1945, became the main film provider for the East German film clubs from 1956 onwards. This would cause a high homogeneity in their programs, at least until the early 1960s. Searching for alternatives, film clubs of a certain standing turned to the embassies and cultural institutions of foreign countries that offered exotic titles for little or no money at all, partially free from state control[18].

This was not fundamentally different to the situation in Spain, where since 1957 the film clubs on the Official Registry could exhibit the films from their federation and the *Filmoteca Nacional*, originally founded in 1953. They made use of this supply but it rapidly became unattractive (after almost 10 years of existence, in early 1963 the *Filmoteca* owned just over 300 copies and these had barely been renewed since 1953)[19]. Other institutions such as the Italian Culture Institute, the American House (*Casa Americana*) at the US Embassy, the

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[18] The screenings of films donated by the Czechoslovakian, Polish or Hungarian Cultural Houses (*Kulturhäuser*) were presented, for instance in Leipzig, as "extraterritorial activities" of these institutions, which granted them a special status in the eyes of the censors.
[19] Figures provided by the director of the *Filmoteca* Carlos Fernández Cuenca in an interview published in the 111th number of *Film Ideal* (1963). Although the *Filmoteca* had been already been officially founded in 1953 it still had no official seat. Its activities, apart from the punctual organization of retrospectives at the San Sebastián international film festival or the lending of some films, were very scarce. From 1959 onwards, the Film Club Federation owned its own films. These included titles such as *Orpheus* by Jean Cocteau (1950) or *Bicycle Thieves* by Vittorio de Sica (1948), which in the course of the next few years would become ubiquitous among the members of the federation.

British Institute or the *Cerclé Lumière* in Barcelona would become an essential part of their activities. Film clubs turned to them in order to offer an alternative program (that put special emphasis on documentary, industrial and avant-garde films) that was also cheap – sometimes even completely free of charge – and benefitted from certain liberties due to the institutions' diplomatic status. This kind of collaboration would also make a difference between the film clubs in bigger urban centers and the rest, largely condemned to working with a homogeneous and less relevant program.

Over the years, the homogeneity of the programs and the material difficulties would lead to a certain boredom and weariness among the film club members. While it is important to note that there are some relevant exceptions (Monterols or some *SEU* film clubs in Spain; the *Club der Filmschaffenden* (Kötzing, 2015) in East Berlin, where the East German film intelligentsia came together), most of them would have serious problems presenting a varied program after the first enthusiast months. Basilio Martín Patino, who had already been behind the foundation of one of Spain's main film clubs in Salamanca in March 1953 and was now a student at the *Instituto de Experiencias e Investigaciones Cinematográficas* in Madrid, lamented in an article for the *SEU* magazine *La Hora* in 1957:

> To love cinema in Spain feels like racking one's brains in a vacuum, it is like longing for something we do not know [...] No film literature, no magazines, no trained people. We are ignorant and ignored and try to build a past that others have already forgotten. I don't know if we have the right to talk about cinema. (Martín Patino, 1957)

With the emergence of the New Cinemas from the late 1950s onwards, the core of this cinephilia, the modern cinema, came too late, mutilated, only to small circles, or it did not come at all (Monterde & Piñol, 2015).

Fred Gehler, director of the Leipzig University Film Club from 1962 onwards, a film critic in some of the main magazines in the country as well as one of the main figures in this new film-cultural field, commented in 1965:

> [T]he French and American cinema of the post-war period is a legend to us, [...] the essential films of Italian Neorealism [...] could not be seen, [...] Japanese, Scandinavian, Latin American cinema barely exists in our theaters, [...] an analysis of the work of directors such as Buñuel, Bergman, Wajda, Fellini, Antonioni, Ichikawa, Resnais, Munk has been totally impossible or, in the best cases, is starting now. (Gehler, 1965)

Just two years later, on the occasion of the opening of the *Salas de Arte y Ensayo,* Jesús García de Dueñas, who at the time was a student at the EOC and worked as a film critic for the film magazine *Nuestro Cine*, expresses a regret similar to that of Gehler. In his article for the culture magazine *Triunfo,* he refers however to the Spanish case:

> For these or other reasons, the cinema aficionado in Spain practically ignores the French *Nouvelle Vague*, the English *Free Cinema*, the American *New Wave*, the resurgence of the Italian cinema, the Polish and Czechoslovakian [film] schools...; in other words, he does not know the movements that have shaped contemporary cinema" (1967).

While recognizing that both Gehler and García de Dueñas ignore in their claims the reception of these works in specialized circles such as festivals, film schools or some film clubs, both texts are good examples of a general impression shared by the cinephilian in both countries: modern cinema could not be shown on their screens.

5. The Three Axes of Cinephilia: Status, Space and Time

What conclusions can be drawn from these and other examples? From the recurrent films and directors screened in the majority of the clubs, from the homogeneous programs – punctually interspersed with some exceptions such as copies of private origin, imported illegally? And what about those references *in absentia*, objects of cinephilian desire such as *Battelship Potemkin* (S. Eisenstein, 1925), (the 'Holy Grail' for the Spanish cinephilia) or Neorealism, which was widely 'read' in the main journals of both countries but barely seen?[20] Without going into detail and commenting on each of the film club programs during these years (the late 1950s and early 1960s), on the basis of their titles[21] and the main debates in the specialist journals I would like to raise some points that are important for an understanding of the film culture of the time. The underlying thesis behind these reflections is that film club programs participated together with the specialized discourses in the press in a process of redefining the cinephilian subculture along three closely intertwined axes (status, time and space)[22].

Let's begin with the most obvious aspect: as already noted, the search for a special 'status', cemented in the cultural differentiation behind their activities, was the basis of the film club work and of the importance that these institutions would gain as a space of discussion during the subsequent decades. This also reflects a wider process of cultural legitimization of cinema that was taking place during those years. First, regarding its artistic status, as we see in the intent, at least since the emergence of the "politique des auteurs", to present the popular cinema as a classical art form[23]. Second, in its growing relevance as a medium of social and political reflection. Institutionally, these changes were also behind the emergence of programs for the promotion of quality cinema, the creation of archives, film schools or university chairs related to cinema[24].

The reference to a 'spatial' axis takes us back to the tension between a national and an international reference framework as one of the constant threads behind the attempt at renewal implicit in the programs of the film clubs or in the discourses in the specialist magazines. The particular examples may vary (while knowledge of French and Italian cinema is essential for an understanding of the Spanish film culture, GDR cinephilia often looked for its models in the works coming from Poland or Czechoslovakia), but their

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[20] José Luis Guarner, an essential figure at the film club Monterols and also an important film critic from the late 1950s onwards, would even ask himself "whether that proliferation [of specialized film criticism] was not to a small extent the consequence of the fact that, because there were no films, we had to make them up in writing." José Luis Guarner en Tubau (1979: 481–482).

[21] This is based on the activity reports addressed to the *Dirección General de Cinematografía y Teatro* by the film clubs as a necessary step before their admission to the Official Registry (*Registro Oficial de Cineclubs*). See in this regard the archives of the Ministry for Information and Tourism in at the AGA, especially the Boxes 15596, 19760 and 20941. In the East German case, as there was no centralized record, the examples are not so numerous (Leipzig and Halle). However, these are completed by the lists with the films that were lent by the State Film Archive from 1956 onwards. In this case, the sources are to be found at the *Bundesarchiv Berlin*, at the *Universitätsarchiv Halle* and at the *Universitätsarchiv Leipzig*.

[22] The relevance of these three axes regarding the classic cinephilia has been already mentioned by Th. Elsaesser (2005).

[23] The traditional object of French cinephilia, Hollywood classical cinema, constitutes one of the main differences between both case studies. In Spain, these films were frequently screened in the commercial cinemas and became a central reference for an important part of the cinephilian discourse, especially in the journal *Film Ideal* during the first half of the 1960s. In the GDR, these productions would gradually be distributed only after 1955 and in very small numbers.

[24] Spain was one of the first European examples in this regard: in 1962, only three years after the foundation of the university chair in Pisa, the *Cátedra de Historia y Estética Cinematográfica* was founded at the *Universidad de Valladolid*. The systematic study of cinema would start in the GDR in the late 1960s with the foundation of the *Deutsche Zentralstelle für Filmforschung* (1960) in Berlin and an Institute for Cinematographic Science (*Institut für Filmwissenschaft*) at the national film school (*Deutsche Hochschule für Filmkunst*) in Potsdam in 1963.

function remained. The focus abroad searched mainly for references capable of offering an alternative and a clear difference to most of those national productions that could be found on the commercial screens. The openness to an international film culture would also develop in the next decade through organs such as the *Fédération Internationale des Ciné-Clubs*, to which both the Spanish and East German federations belonged from 1965 on (the *Fédération* held its 1968 annual meeting in Madrid, and Claus Küchenmeister participated in it as a representative of the East German film clubs). This development was also fostered via private journeys to Prague and Warsaw or Paris and Rome in order to watch and purchase films that would be disseminated through more or less official networks until they literally fell to pieces. And it also owed much to the – sometimes deficient but mostly extremely enthusiastic – reception of international debates in the main European film journals (the French *Cahiers du cinéma* or *Les Lettres françaises*, the Italian *Cinema Nuovo*).

The third 'temporal' axis refers to the growing interest observed in both countries in the past, in film history, which in those years began to be studied in search of new references for the new generations. This interest in rescuing certain traditions and genealogical lines, in rediscovering names and titles, in setting themselves apart from the mainstream, is at the same time founded on the discourses of the specialist magazines and different film histories that appeared in this period, on the retrospectives organized by the new film festivals, on the activities of archives, or on the development of a new film-historical cannon.

In these circles, to look at the past implied a double form of participation in a transnational project. It was a way of taking part in a contemporary debate that was international in character. However, it also implied looking at a common cultural tradition, at the rediscovery of a series of references relating to a historical narrative in the process of its canonization, an account cinephilians from Spain, Germany, France or Italy could easily relate to. This was an account the most significant episodes of which are the French and Italian pioneers, the Russian (Montage), German (Expressionism) and French (Impressionism) avant-gardes of the 1920s, the British documentary film movement and the French Poetic Realism of the 1930s. Or in other words: Georges Méliès, Friedrich W. Murnau, Fritz Lang, René Clair, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Robert Flaherty, Joris Ivens, Sergei M. Eisenstein, Jean Renoir, Charlie Chaplin...

Nevertheless, in the Spanish and East German cases this look to the past was not only an option, but was often simply a necessity. The objective was to use the films of the past to educate the audience of the future – because the contemporary productions (especially the works of the New Cinemas from the late 1950s onwards) were only partially accessible. When these films were finally available, they would be seen in both countries from a mediated perspective that already took into account the debates around their reception in other countries and minored their innovative character (see Monterde and Piñol, 2015: 9). However, older productions were more or less available thanks to the older copies in certain distribution companies, informal contacts or the abovementioned work of film archives.

6. Conclusions and Outlook

This article analyzes a cultural phenomenon of quite uncertain scope by focusing on the emergence and institutional assimilation of one of its most representative organizations, the film clubs. The focus on the clubs placed certain limitations in order to formulate conclusions of a general nature about cinephilia as a cultural practice (a broader, systematic analysis of this phenomenon should also include at least a thorough study of its discourses and of the praxis and 'habitus' of its protagonists). However, it has also allowed us to analyze the particularities of the national alternatives and to present significant differences and similarities in their assimilation (pivoting around the three axes of status, space and time)

pointing to the broader process of the film-cultural renaissance also observed in other European countries during the 1950s and 1960s.

To return to the film clubs: they symbolize the national variations of the renaissance of the film culture in different European countries during the first two postwar decades and the creation of alternative spaces for the screening and discussion of films offering an alternative to commercial cinemas, as well as the quite constant intent of both states to influence their youth, especially in university circles. However, the cultural differentiation at the core of the film club activities would usually render their instrumentalization difficult. Despite their different points of departure, East German and Spanish film clubs around 1960 found themselves in a no man's land: they were more or less officially recognized by the authorities but not really integrated into the initiatives of the state's cultural policies. This phenomenon was especially striking in the East German case, where there were plenty of institutions and agitation groups, as well as a cultural doctrine that should have exercised the necessary control on their activities and where, at least during the first years, there had already existed an intent to influence them. Nevertheless, the homogenizing aspiration of the cultural policy would know its limits in the cine club activities. In the Spanish case, where at least in the case of cinema and in the period analyzed in this text the mere existence of a unified and affirmative cultural policy can be seriously called into question, the history of the film clubs also serves to illustrate the function of institutions with an important presence in the educational and cultural fields during the 1950s and 1960s. Institutions as diverse as the Catholic Church, the *SEU*, the *PCE* or, in the case of the Monterols film club, Opus Dei.

The process of the institutional assimilation of the clubs would gain momentum in both countries during the 1960s. In Spain, encouraged by the legal disposition regarding censorship and film imports of 1963, film clubs would become more relevant as places of political and cultural dissent throughout the rest of the decade. This took place parallel to a progressive loss of state interest in their activities: the *SEU* for instance, which had been crucial in their development during the previous decade, was finally suppressed in 1965.

In the GDR, the 1960s were the decade in which the clubs finally started to enjoy a certain institutional presence (in December 1963 they organized themselves around a national association, the *AG Filmclubs*) and a broader material basis for their activities (mainly with the support of the State Film Archive). However, after 1965 they also started to feel the narrowness of new political developments again. This culminated in the banning of their annual convention in Meißen in 1968. Just a few weeks after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, this episode made it clear that the relative liberal cultural policies that had enabled a certain institutional empowerment of the film clubs during the first half of the decade had come to an end.

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