

## TOWARDS SOCIAL CINEMA: EXTENDING OF RIGA POETIC STYLE IN THE 1970s

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### Abstract

In the 1960s, a group of young and very gifted documentary filmmakers established themselves at Riga Film Studio and developed a poetic style, based on visual metaphors which they named themselves as Riga Style but later in the Soviet and East European context the style and its creators came to be known as Riga Poetic Documentary Film School. Yet in the 1970s one can identify pronounced focusing by the documentary filmmakers on social issues, the aspirations to offer in their films analysis of the problems existing in the society and sometimes offering their solution without losing the artistic qualities of the films. The article written in 1971 by Armīns Lejiņš, the script writer and theorist of the poetic cinema, “Poetic Cinema + Scientific Cinema = Social Cinema” can be perceived as their manifesto. Lejiņš was convinced that by combining poetry and science, Riga documentary filmmakers could facilitate henceforth logical, analytical and dialectical thinking culture in their films.

Within the framework of my article, I’ll provide a broader insight into the social angle of films by Latvian documentary filmmakers, into their thematic and aesthetic aspects, and also offer a more detailed analysis of the film “The Woman We Expect?” (*Sieviete, kuru gaida?*, 1978) – the concept, the process of its making, relations with censorship and its reception.

**Keywords:** *Latvian cinema, documentary film, Riga Poetic Documentary Film School, Ivars Seleckis.*

Drawing of exact chronological borderlines among trends and phenomena in art history is sometimes hard or even impossible, yet these borderlines became quite clear in the documentary film of Latvia at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s. Riga poetic style that was based on visual metaphors and subjective capturing of reality reached its peak possibly at the end of the 1960s in Riga Film Studio’s feature-length

documentary “The Catch” (*Lomi*, 1969, Aivars Freimanis). With 1970 documentary film “Girls from Valmiera” (*Valmieras meitenes*, director and cameraman Ivars Seleckis), a new thematic stage started in Latvian documentary film making – an in-depth interest about the temporal and spatial social system of those times, about their problems, interaction between the individual and society. The social dimension of the documentary films facilitated also a deeper interest in theoretical issues which resulted in establishing of an International Documentary Film-makers’ Symposium. The Symposium that included both screenings and theoretical analysis of films was organized since 1977 once in two years in Latvian resort Jūrmala, and during the socialist period it was one of the most prestigious documentary film events in Eastern Europe. Significantly, the theme of 1979 symposium was “Social Problems in Documentary Film. Representation and Analysis”, looking back at the achievements of the previous decade and outlining the prospects of development of cinema about topical issues. Ivars Seleckis’ film “The Woman We Expect?” became the “main” film at the symposium becoming a peculiar evidence of significance and quality of the social cinema.<sup>1</sup>

“Girls from Valmiera” seems to be the first feature-length Riga Film Studio film in whose explication the director defined its genre as “**socially-psychological cinematic study**” [LVA 208: 153], in which the dramatic intrigue was going to be developed by interaction between two main lines: observation and analysis [LVA 208: 154]. Initially the study field had been described in general terms – “formation of the contemporary young generation of workers” [LVA 208: 153], but gradually an analytical story crystallized, it was a story about a town in Latvia where a glass fibre plant had been built to which women from the entire USSR came to work – women workers that unsettled the community’s demographic and ethnic balance, and caused also other social and economic problems, for example, shortage of flats and kindergartens.

The author of the idea and the script of the film of “Girls from Valmiera” Armīns Lejiņš was one of the Riga poetic style founders in the 1960s, so was Ivars Seleckis who was the leading cameraman of the poetic cinema in the 1960s. But at the end of the 1960s, as Ivars Seleckis remembers later: “A pause set in, a sense of emptiness set in. (..) Many rushed into making sociological films since that was something new and interesting, you can choose different approach in comparison to the previous period, and you can look for correlations” [Jēruma 2009: 123].

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<sup>1</sup> Symposia history continued also in the post-soviet time by setting up the organization European Documentary Film Symposiums in 1993, see: <https://dokweb.net/database/organizations/about/011a61da-41b0-4e21-8be6-5228568e4b74/european-documentary-film-symposiums>. Symposia history and materials have been collected in a book [Matīsa, Redovičs 2007].

Armīns Lejiņš got his inspiration for a new kind of film at the end of the 1960s in Ukraine at Kiev Popular Science Film Studio (*Київнаукафільм/Київнаукафільм*), with which at that time Riga documentary filmmakers had established close contacts: “Kiev filmmakers perhaps were the first ones to turn to social sciences seriously and they brought their science films closer to modern life. A series of social publicist films were made (..) that instead of merely informing about science and its research, they used the soviet sociology and psychology achievements in a way becoming part of the research process by analysing, looking for causes, comparing and generalizing...” [Lejiņš 1971]. Such films are not based on the authors’ poetic perception of phenomena but a on fact-based scientific material [Lejiņš 1970].

The film “Girls from Valmiera” was made “under direct influence of Kiev filmmakers, particularly during the preparatory stage when the authors had to identify the key issues and the main problems in the life of almost two thousand young women workers. They even used literature suggested by Kiev colleagues about the sociological research done in our country among the working youth” [Lejiņš 1971].

Looking back at the film “Girls from Valmiera” 30 years later, Armīns Lejiņš is much more critical about the use of “sociological method” in the film: “Questions that are asked in the film showed my understanding about sociology in those days. And also that of the epoch. Perhaps today it sounds amateurish but that was the way it was. Approximation psychology was in fashion” [Krūmiņa 2000/2001].

It should be noted that sociological data and statistics was information of restricted access in the USSR because the soviet power essentially evaded any kind of generalizations, and the documentary filmmakers were also asked to emphasize that the problems identified in their films were not typical, that they were short-lived and the party was solving them.

From today’s perspective one can see that by its artistic language “Girls from Valmiera” had not been a radical turning point, instead the visual metaphoricity acquired an additional dimension combining it with reflexive analysis characteristic for *cinema verite* style and reportage of *direct cinema*. The well-known theorist of Riga documentary cinema Mihails Savisko wrote as follows: “The films devoted to the theme of the working class very clearly and explicitly reveal one of the most important creative problems of the contemporary stage of development of soviet documentary cinema. In brief, it can be formulated as follows: how to eliminate the contradiction between fact and image? (..) The so-called direct cinema that can most effectively meet the demands for factual credibility obviously cannot uncover the essence of processes of reality, their reflection in the internal world of people. It can be done only by artistic approach that offers generalizations on the basis of concreteness” [Savisko 1972].

Compositionally the film “Girls from Valmiera” begins with a symbolic image: weathervane in the shape of a rooster that is installed on a tower of a small-town church, becomes a proto-model for the majority of subsequent films by Ivars Seleckis, in which impassive reportage interacts with intimate portraits of people, the narrator’s voice-over with honest conversations and the director always chooses a special recurrent image or images that become symbols in the film. Since his directorial debut, unlike the majority of representatives of Riga Style, for Seleckis the voice-over narrative has been an organic part of the film. While working with the sound recording in the film the director had made the following entry in his diary: “We are writing the text. (..) Armīns “proves” that you cannot talk over the image and therefore nothing should be said. I certainly can’t agree to that” [Jēruma 2009: 128].

Film Studio administration in Riga, according to the director’s memories, had been very negatively disposed to the film calling it “a slap in the face of working-class” [Jēruma 2009: 128]. There is no such evidence preserved in the archival materials, but one can see that the Cinema Committee in Moscow evaluated the film positively and approved it for screening in the entire USSR. Before dubbing the film in Russian some changes were still suggested, for example, to remove the scenes in which the girls on their way to work crawl under train carriages<sup>1</sup>, to shorten birthday celebration and wine drinking scenes in the hostel and the like [LVA 208: 5]. It was typical for the soviet documentary cinema to put the right ideological accents with the help of the voice-over text. As for “Girls from Valmiera” the USSR Cinema Committee recommended that in “the episode The Weaving Workshop the voice-over text should be supplemented with the phrase that the girls like the chosen profession and the work gives them sense of gratification” [LVA 208: 5].

“Girls from Valmiera” was a stimulus for further development of the social cinema at Riga Film Studio: already in 1971 two films that were to strengthen the fundamentals of analytical cinema were made; it was a full-length documentary “Your Pay Day” (*Tava algas diena*, script and director Herz Frank, camera Ivars Seleckis) and the short film “Faces” (*Sejas*, Imants Brils).

“Your Pay Day” was highly appreciated by the contemporaries but since then it seems to have disappeared from cultural cinema memory of Latvia, perhaps the reason was its minimalistic style that was less impressive than subsequent documentary

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<sup>1</sup> This episode was left in the film. It is interesting that in the most renowned film in the world by Ivars Seleckis “Side Street” (*Šķērsiela*, 1988) inhabitants of Riga suburbs also had to crawl under cargo trains to get home. The author of the present article spent a period in her life in this side street and crawling under the train that could start moving any moment is one of the most horrifying and still living memories.

films by Herz Frank that were artistically very expressive and thematically open and devoted to acute topics.

In the application submitted for his film in January 1970 Herz Frank wrote: “For the fifth-year economic reforms have been implemented in the country. The focus in economics is on economic growth, production efficiency, and intensification of economics” [LVA 245: 129]. Economic reform was started in the Soviet Union in 1965 that was called unofficially by the name of the Chairperson of the Council of Ministers of the time Alexey Kosigin (*Алексей Косыгин*) – Kosigin’s reform. The goals of the reform were generally as described by Frank but the soviet authorities tried to achieve intensification of economy practically without changing the already established socialist economy foundations, therefore the success of the reform was limited and its implementation was inconsistent.

Frank indicates that his film genre is going to be a publicist and psychological research whose main theme will be linked to the sense of proprietorship in one’s land, to building of economic austerity and sense of responsibility for production. Dramatic tension of the film is to be a collision between publicly active, ideologically convinced people and the ones who are passive, undisciplined and slovenly [LVA 245: 129–132].

As for the dramatic elements, it must be noted that there are no black/white oppositions as described in the initial application for the film, the same as they were not in “Girls from Valmiera”, Frank was even criticized for it in the Studio that one “does not see real battle between the good and the bad” [LVA 245: 116]. The location of the film was changed too, initially the director had planned to focus all the action of the film in the largest and most successful factory of Latvia called VEF (State Electro-technical Factory) that manufactured radio sets, phones and other things but the main plot line in the final version of the film was the flow of money from bank to an individual and back, thus studying whether and how money is invested, what people want and what can actually be bought for the earned roubles, how big the role in manufacturing process for the work pay is and what other aspects influence the work efficiency, and so on. It is interesting that both in this film, as well as in the subsequently described film “Faces” a number of phenomena unpleasant for the ruling ideology have been captured – lack of quality goods in shops, huge queues, for example, for bananas, discrepancy between words and deeds in the daily life of the factory and so on, but in this case practically all the footage made and selected by the director was accepted and an additional commentary was demanded in the voice-over only in the episode “Interview with VEF manager”, in which the Communist party decision “On Improvement of Organizing Socialist Competition” was to be mentioned [LVA 245: 92].

Herz Frank considered that the interview mentioned above with VEF manager in which he tells how reality differs from what is written in party decisions to be one of the most successful episodes in the film. In general filmmakers avoided using synchronous sound because straightforward and open discussions were still rare in Soviet cinema, during the filming people automatically resorted to ideologically approved phrases or *sbrank into themselves* altogether. This was quite the opposite case. In his book on documentary film “Ptolemy Map” Frank wrote: “While interviewing Vsevolods Birkenfelds, we put the main emphasis on the synchronous interview with him. And we seem to have made no mistake. Externally the simplest episode causes the strongest reaction. And not only by the harshness of the mentioned problems is the talk about the ways of economic reform. The conversation revealed the manager’s personality, directness, sense of involvement, trust in documentary filmmakers and the spectators. Character was revealed. Yes, neither expression nor rhythm – nothing in human portrait can replace his live word pronounced from the screen!” [Franks 1975: 101–102].

Like in Seleckis’ films, in Frank’s “Your Pay Day” also there was to be a character that had to become symbolic from the initial idea of when film’s theme was formulated: “Is it easy to bring up a person only paying him roubles? No, forgetting about the moral side (..) it will lead to a consumer’s psychology: That only money matters!” [LVA 245: 130].

At the beginning of the film were shown two sides of a coin: on one side we see a number, on the other – the coat of arms, and later in the film the director has tried to examine the problems both from the perspective of state and moral interests and also from perspective of profit and consumption. Although later Frank said that he did not like “Your Pay Day” too much because something in it had been too artificial, too much of a construct [Frolova 1978].

An expression in subjunctive mood “analytical cinema foundations should have been strengthened” was used in regard of films made before 1971 and specifically was a phrase applied to the documentary film “Faces” that became the so-called “film on the shelf” because it was allowed to be screened only to “selected audience” [LVA 250: 2].

The destiny of this film quite clearly reminded the filmmakers that socialist realism was not the same as reality, thus reducing for some time their wish to express themselves openly and critically. By its intention “Faces” is close to the world-renown *perestroika* manifesto made 15 years later: the film “Is it Easy to be Young?” (*Vai viegli būt jaunam?*, 1986, Juris Podnieks). “Faces” was announced as “sociological cinematic observation about the life of young people”, the film that was to study the micro-world of youth groupings [LVA 250: 53]. It turned out that in Latvia, mainly in Riga, there were many informal communities that could be externally recognized mainly by their long hair and dressing style similar to hippies and who had a common

interest in Western music and other manifestations of capitalist culture. The voice-over text of the film summed it all up in a critically pathetic voice: "It all has one stamp. Borrowed! Borrowed! Borrowed!"

Unlike the young people in mid-1980s, who openly and freely talked with Juris Podnieks, the young people at the beginning of the 1970s were not disposed to candid conversations either with the script-writer of the film *Ilgonis Bite*, or with the director Imants Brils. Therefore the Studio decided to film with a secret camera,<sup>1</sup> by observing the gatherings of the young people in the city cafes, by participating in the militia raids during which separate long-haired guys were arrested (ironically, that along with the *long-haired men* another guy has been filmed who had a clean-shaven head and was treated with equal disapproval), as well as small groups in unsanctioned places of gathering, they also arrested the so-called idlers, the young men who were unable to name a specific place of their work or studies.

It all resulted in an expressly ambivalent film. On the one hand, the images documented a generation whose considerable part completely denied the values and life style offered by the soviet ideology, on the other hand, the didactic voice-over narrative tried to tell us that those were only very few, separate individuals, but their chosen life-style was dangerous to society and therefore should be combated. The contrast between images and the verbal text is particularly explicit in an episode which today is hard to judge whether it appeared in the film because of the authors' lack of knowledge or it was a part of an intentional and cunning plan of the authors to deconstruct the imposed didacticism: the narrator declares that everything that has been borrowed from the West is "merely a form without any real joy of experience" and therefore also Angela Davis' portrait on a shirt brought from abroad has no meaning... But the portrait on his T-shirt was that of Jimi Hendrix...

The positive elements intended in the film (students of the Academy of Arts; a long-haired yet very talented and *socially obedient* young physicist) that had to illustrate that uncommon external looks do not necessarily mean opposition to social values, were cut to the minimum when the film was finished. Yet despite all the cuttings and explaining of everything by the narrator in ideologically correct way, the images of the film apparently seemed too blasphemous, perhaps they also documented too obviously the intolerance and brutality of the soviet power to the otherness, therefore the film was banned from screening and as years went by it became a legend, a cult object inaccessible during the soviet times.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It was filmed with 16 mm camera; afterwards it was copied on 35 mm film print. As can be read in documentation of the film it had been done for the first time in the USSR [LVA 250:3].

<sup>2</sup> The author can present evidence that in the 1970s and 1980s this film was regularly discussed in "kitchen talk" as an essential opposition to hippie culture although no one of the speakers had seen the film.

*The first Latvian documentary block-buster*, this is how the film “The Woman We Expect?” was named by Inga Jēruma in her book about Ivars Seleckis and his wife Maija Selecka, film editor [Jēruma 2009: 185]. The designation is not an exaggeration because no other Latvian documentary film had caused such a resonance before. During two years (1978–1980) the film had been watched by 273 thousand people in cinemas of Latvia [Margēvičs 1980], it was shown on TV and in the entire territory of the USSR (unfortunately it was impossible to get exact data), the film was discussed in work places and in press showing that sex and gender issue was extremely topical in society. It was also the first time when a literary magazine (possibly for the first time ever in Latvia!) published the literary script of the documentary film whose authors were Andrejs Dripe and Tāivaldis Margēvičs [Karogs 1978].

The consultant of the film “The Woman We Expect?”, doctor of economic sciences, Viktor Perevedentsev wrote in his review on the film: “It is in general the first full-fledged demographic documentary film in soviet film art” [LVA 485: 84].

Later Ivars Seleckis said: ““The Woman We Expect?” facilitated popularity of the documentary cinema itself, the art form as such. (..) Prestige of the documentary film depends on whether films that appeal to the audience’s demand are made. (..) The existence of documentary film depends on publicist films, because those weak, glorifying films are not watched by anyone anymore” [Jēruma 2009: 196–197]. “The Woman We Expect?” became the winner of the newly established Professional film award “Lielais Kristaps” in 1978 in the category “Best documentary” (now – the National Film Award).

Similarly to the film “Girls from Valmiera” the reception of artistic expressivity has changed over the years. The lack of metaphoricity for the film in making was reproached by Film Studio colleagues [LVA 255: 76], but when the film was finished it was perceived as one of its merits. For example, Armīns Lejiņš stressed that the director had chosen to make the film black and white and it was characterized by “Minimalistic camera expressivity if we evaluate it from a formal point of view. Refusal from “pictorial approach”. Shots that are even quite crude. So openly documentary that they resemble pictures of material evidence gathered in a folder of an investigator. (..) Because the film was intended to be **consistently documentary** cinematic study” [Lejiņš 1978]. After a few years Maija Selecka saw the film differently: ““The Woman We Expect?” is such a romantic film: beautiful music and images, seriousness and problems, social issues and at the same time it possesses metaphoricity and visual beauty” [Jēruma 2009: 194], and one should agree to that today: symbols, visual and meaningful metaphors run throughout the film, and in general it is characterized by very well-balanced combination of fact and image.

Today the film has become a useful reference to a certain epoch in a prose work as well. Laima Kota’s novel “The Room” (2016) which is part of the series “We.



Latvia, XX Century” is set in the 1980s during the times of Gorbachev’s *perestroika* when it was allowed to set up co-operative stores and do home craft. A woman who looks of an age of recent retirement<sup>1</sup> appears in the lobby of the communal flat with a fascinating voice, the inhabitants of the flat have hired her for the “phone sex” business. One of the characters introduces her: “She is a celebrity – do you remember the most valuable and funny excerpts from the film “The Woman We Expect?”. Here she is – the woman waiting on a bench. I have found a real professional!” [Kota 2016: 171].

It is interesting to note the so-called *bench episode* – in which prostitutes are interviewed in the park (this word certainly was not used in the film because officially there were no prostitutes in the USSR, in the same way as there was supposed to be no censorship) links the film “The Woman We Expect?” with “Faces”. In the latter film too, the young people who idle away their time on the park benches became a signifier of sloth and lewdness, a mode of life unacceptable for the soviet style of life. In the film “The Woman We Expect?” her life *on a bench* is spent perhaps by the most excruciating and powerful briefly-appearing image of the film – Mērija, an elderly woman alcoholic whose portrait in the soundtrack is accompanied by a nostalgic hit of the 1920s.

When the editing of the film “The Woman We Expect?” had been already finished, the USSR State Cinematography Committee had particularly strong objections to this episode: “The episode *On the Bench* must be removed from the film because by its essence it is not an organic part of the film since it deals with morally ethical problem which is not connected to the overall theme of the film and does not concern only women. Besides, its visual presentation is naturalistic without providing the cause of her situation” [LVA 485: 80].

An interesting evidence for the soviet state demographic policy is a suggestion by the consultant Victor Perevedentsev *to change slightly the tonality* in the novella about the teacher, a mother of ten: “Many children are not our demographic and social ideal at all. A family with three children is an optimum family for reproduction of society which should be propagated. We know very well from the letters sent to the editorial office that propaganda about large families causes explicitly negative reaction among women. True, there is no particular large family propaganda but the attitude towards it is entirely positive which hardly would be correct” [LVA 485: 84–85]. Apparently, the official attitude by the state had been fully accepted by society because when a mother of many children had been asked about the attitude to her family, she mentions even hate mail.

The film (this episode had been actually made before the consultant’s advice) features also a family with three children so desirable for society: it is represented

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<sup>1</sup> Retirement age at that time in the USSR was 55.

by a doctors' family from a well-known doctors' dynasty in Latvia. Doctor Lūkina perhaps is the most suitable for an ideal woman imagined by the authors of the film, she is "the woman we expect", because she does work that is interesting for her, and apart from that she had created a family as she wished – at least that is what she says in the film. And yet Ivars Seleckis has made a note in his diary during the filming: "I examined materials of doctor Lūkina. It seems that she offers to us for filming those episodes in which she knows she looks well. In fact, she is manipulating with us like with trained rabbits while we thought we are the ones to set the tune!" [Jēruma 2009: 194].

And still this story contains an ample amount of bitterness: from the narrator's commentary we find out that initially the doctor was predicted a brilliant surgeon's career but she gave it up since excellence in her professional activities would take up her entire life. Lūkina's episode shows a pattern of a woman's daily life that in the film has not been revealed sufficiently enough, and this was one of the criticisms expressed by the audience to the filmmakers: we see how the doctor after her work goes from one shop to another one to buy food for the family, she is queuing up, takes clothes to the dry-cleaners and so on. She stresses herself in the film how disproportionately large part of her time is spent on daily chores. Yet the film never shows a hint of doubt that the daily chores are exclusively the responsibility of a woman...

Evidence on incompatibility of outstanding scientist's career with private life is provided by the film authors in the story of scientist and chemist Milda Pormale who does not have her own family and children. The scientist's episode seemed ethically problematic for the filmmakers already during the making of the film. Apart from her work in the laboratory she was filmed also indulging in her hobby the angling (traditionally considered to be male prerogative) – and this episode is made in a way as to emphasize *non-femininity* of the scientist and her loneliness. It is completely obvious what the authors wanted her to say during the interview, and the scientist says that, admitting that in general the mission of a woman is to be mother, someone who is to continue human race. Ivars Seleckis has made an entry in his diary about making this episode: "Tālis [Tāļivaldis Margēvičs] asks an unexpected question about femininity and woman of the future, and then one can see she understands what is expected from her. She gets covered in sweat and says that a woman's life without family would not be welcome, i. e., she admits that her life is not full-fledged for this reason" [Jēruma 2009: 193].

A similar pressure by the filmmakers – to admit the role of family and children in woman's life – can be seen also in other episodes. Margēvičs asks a chairperson of a collective-farm about her plans and she says that she would still like to study in the future. When the interviewer keeps insisting by mentioning children, the chairperson gives in, by saying that she should have children, too, but education for

her would be of primary importance. Ironically, also the conversation with one of the women *on the bench* is almost identical. Margēvičs asks her if she would like to get married and the woman responds by saying: “Is marriage the most important thing?” She is asked what an ideal of a woman is and she describes it exactly as the filmmakers expect her: a woman with a husband and children. “But then you will not reach this ideal”, says the script-writer. “No, and I don’t even want it”, the woman *on the bench* answers.

The director of the film remembers of approval of the film at the Board of documentary, popular scientific and educational films of the Cinematography Committee of the USSR as a very difficult process: “The ruling opinions of the state and society clashed with the views expressed in our film” [Jērums 2009: 195], namely, the officially declared equality of women with the actual women’s situation in daily life in which apart from the highly appreciated work for the benefit of society, women were also the ones to be responsible for upbringing of children and the domestic life. This latter work, as clearly shown in the film, had no official value. To quote the mother of ten in the film: “People think if you live at home you are not doing anything at all.”

Before approval of the film the Cinematography Committee of the USSR indicated at some other drawbacks they saw in the documentary: “In the proposed edition of the film certain phenomena of life are only named and therefore interpretation of many episodes gains subjective negativism (..), many objective factors hampering solution of many problems are not taken into consideration, including the issue how to exempt women from hard jobs and the jobs causing health hazards. The Board considers that the following additions are required: 1) to re-consider the voice-over commentary clearly outlining in it not only problems but also their solution from the position of the state and the party. Besides, the commentary must be of analytical character with emotional attitude of the author to the problematic issues; 2) we recommend to represent in the film in an adequate balance not only the negative phenomena but provide also examples when the women live in harmony with themselves, to show the care of the state to the situation of women in our society; (..) the Board deems it necessary to remove the prologue of the film that shows military training of troops since it has been filmed in a manner since it does not comply with our documentary film tradition of representation of daily life of the Soviet Army” [LVA 485: 80–81].

It must be stressed that in the finished film all the episodes that administration considered to be censored are still there! The film editor Maija Selecka later commented: “Eventually we removed four shots from the film, one from each episode. Formally no one could give us orders, only make suggestions – the artist in the Soviet Union was an important person!” [Jērums 2009: 196].

It is interesting that one of the reproaches by film administration had not so much to do with the contents but aesthetics – the training of paratroopers shown in the prologue of the film was indeed filmed in a non-typical way for soviet cinema – as a fascinating and brutal dance with demonstrations of strength (breaking of bricks by palm), with elements of acrobatics and combat. The voice-over narrator makes a comment: “The transient heroism of man is rooted in the life-long heroism of woman”, masculinity becomes a point of reference in the film. The starting point of the film is determined by the subject – the man. At the very beginning the declaration comes from the perspective of man “Tender, loving – **we** want her to be like that **next to us**” (*bold – I. P.*), and all the subsequent – analytical, contradictory, diverse episodes in fact purposefully lead to the idea that has been clear to the authors from the very beginning that the mission of a woman is to be a mother. In the final episode the idea is represented by a poetic image: a young woman is breastfeeding a baby against the backdrop of an old farm house.

After the film was finished, its authors declared on several occasions their opinions about woman's role in society also in press. For example, Ivars Seleckis said as follows: “Sometimes lack of skills and desire to probe the essence of these issues leads to vulgarizing of woman's rights, and that causes a big harm. Every woman who thinks logically and reasonably should understand that she has all the advantages and equalities, only they have to be used in a balanced way. (..) One should be able to apply legal rights sensibly not to harm oneself and the future society. (..) Woman must understand her mission on this earth by herself” [Jēruma 1978].

Conviction that woman cannot be happy without man is declared also by Tālivaldis Margēvičs: “Men like feminine women, and nothing can be done about it. If the woman is not like that, and men don't like her that she will never be really happy. (..) Woman's main task is to be mother. No one can deprive her of this function and it cannot be mechanically exchanged for any other function that superficially judging could be more useful for society” [Jēruma 1978].

An interesting comment about the film “The Woman We Expect?” was to be found among emigre press publications (although for the soviet readers it was not available at the time!). Ojārs Rozītis, a Latvian born in Germany, who had been studying women's situation in Soviet Latvia, wrote in 1984: “If one looks through Latvian periodicals after the film “The Woman We Expect?” then we can find innumerable letters in which women write with indignation – we are unable to identify with this film, it shows our problem in a completely wrong way. (..) Women have learned to stand on their own two feet and try to resist what is being attempted to impose upon them” [Elja 1984].

By the word “imposed” Rozītis means *driving back the women into their homes*: “An observation can be made that during the last few years women are driven back

more. They are removed from public production motivating it by the fact that in the nearest future there would be shortage of labour force – it must be given birth to. This stimulus fostered by the state coincides very well with general attitude of men to women in Soviet Latvia” [Elja 1984].

Ojārs Rozītis saw in the activity among women facilitated by the film the same kind of seed from which women’s emancipation movement could grow in the same way like in West [Elja 1984]. Keeping in mind that the number of publications was small in the Soviet Union and they all were censored the number of reviews about “The Woman We Expect?” was indeed considerable: in a couple of months at the turn of 1978/1979, 19 large articles were published [Films in Soviet Latvia 1978: 42–43], besides some of them summarized opinions expressed in the spectators’ letters.

Opinions about the film were largely dependent on the commentators’ gender, all in all women as if tried to defend themselves by using in most cases offensive tactics. A female reader wrote as follows: “The film seems to be made to defend women but actually it accuses them. (..) Is it worthwhile to give birth to children if you have no conviction that their father will be a genuine helper and support to you? Well, this is the reason why children should not be given birth to” [Kino 1979].

A surprisingly open discussion among experts from different fields had taken place in the editorial office of the weekly *Literatūra un Māksla* (“Literature and Art”) revealing also a demagogical element in the film. For example, the economist Pārsla Eglīte mentions episodes filmed with hidden camera at the maternity hospital: “A young female worker is asked – why do you refuse from your child? She explains the conditions, that she has remained alone. Then the worker is told – “You will receive benefit”. But single mother’s benefit is only 5 roubles per month, and the partly paid maternity leave is to be introduced only at the end of the five-year period. But if the woman remains alone, she cannot work” [LM 1978].

Journalist Marina Kosteņecka adds (a similar argument is expressed also in the readers’ letters) that the episode about refusal from the child “completely lacks the idea about the father’s guilt in this situation” [LM 1978].

Discussions about the film voiced the idea which was equally accepted by film critics, experts and “common” spectators. It was represented in one of the readers’ letters: “In order to depict the problem touched by the authors precisely and truthfully it seems to me that another full-length documentary is to be made whose contents might be expressed in the title “the man as we want to see him”” [LM 1979].

In 1981, Tāļivaldis Margēvičs and Ivars Seleckis indeed prepared a treatment for the film whose working title was “The Man and the Man”. Yet the film under the title “Looking for a Man” (*Meklēju vīrieti*) came out in cinemas only in 1983. According to Ivars Seleckis: “The Studio did not want us to make a film about men

at all. There were big problems in the Soviet Union with them. For example, men's mortality rate was the highest in Europe, and they tried to hide it in all kinds of ways, since it influenced the strategic plans of the state" [Jērums 2009: 241].

The structure of the film "Looking for a Man" is generally similar to that of "The Woman We Expect?" – the film begins with an emblematic image – a drunkard who is unable to sit up straight on a bench (again a bench!) and the film finishes with another emblematic image (father with twins in a pram), the narrative of the film combines sociological type of information with different models of life represented by specific individuals. Yet unlike the film about women in this case the authors have no clear and unequivocal insight what an ideal man should be like and answers to this question cannot be provided by the surveyed women either. Therefore, there is much less didactics in the film and it poses questions but does not provide ready-made answers and recipes. In its own time this conceptual looseness was the reason for criticizing the film, and the resonance it caused was smaller. But today, I believe, these drawbacks have become the values of the film – it is still a topical human life document in which the codes and gender stereotypes have quite a little significance.

### Summary

In the present article I have attempted to give an insight into trends of Latvian documentary film in the 1970s, which is an interesting period when filmmakers tried to represent in their works of art the topical problems of society in those days often getting into conflicting situations with the official ideology and institutions administering art. When Riga documentary filmmakers who in the 1960s had established a distinctly poetic film language based on visual metaphor, turned to social issues, they still considered important not to lose the previous imagery: attempts to combine facts and images became an essential problem in the context of social cinema of the 1970s.

An in-depth analysis of Ivars Seleckis' film "The Woman We Expect?" (1978) has been offered in the present article – it was a film that caused unprecedented resonance in the sphere of documentary film by that facilitating also interest in documentary film in general, and also exposing the acuteness of gender issues in the Soviet Union.

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