

WHY'D YOU HAVE TO TAKE OUR KODACHROME AWAY?

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WITH THE THREAT OF TOTAL DIGITAL DOMINATION OF MOVING IMAGES LOOMING, GROUPS LIKE MONO NO AWARE, CHERRY KINO, AND THE ECHO PARK FILM CENTER WORK TO KEEP ANALOGUE FILMMAKING ALIVE. THROUGH SELF-ORGANIZED WORKSHOPS, SCREENINGS AND COMMUNITY INTERACTIONS THEY EMPHASIZE THE RELUCTANCE OF YOUNGER GENERATIONS OF FILMMAKERS TO GIVE UP THE TRADITION OF ANALOGUE PROCESSES.

As the landscape of contemporary mainstream film has changed to promote entirely digital production and distribution, a handful of people, scattered across the globe, are making a stand to teach others how to shoot, process and edit on film. That does not mean a complete retreat from digitalization. It could be seen more like a marriage between the old and the new, using analogue techniques combined with digital technologies.

Rumor has it that the National Football League used to be the biggest purchaser of 16mm Kodak film in the United States to record and archive all the game footage. But those days have long passed, since analogue filmmaking has been slowly phased out from various mainstream modes of film

production. Sports, advertising and narrative film have all gone digital, leaving the analogue aficionado no place to go but underground. These are rough times for the old school film, but the analogue team is at least as tough as the whole National Football League. DIY organizations around the world keep their chin up and preserve the knowledge of how to make these sorts of films. Beginners, who want to learn analogue filmmaking techniques, are just as welcome as film lovers, who frequent these communities for screenings and expanded cinema events. Those, who have already made their path as filmmakers use them as a place to work, network and discuss, as well as an affordable place to rent equipment and buy film stock. Thanks to all those analogue oases, the know-how, that would otherwise be lost over time, is being kept alive.

LOOKING BACK

These groups can be contextualized within a larger trend of people supporting what Steve Cossman from MONO NO AWARE in New York City refers to as an “analogue renaissance”. Since the 1990s large advancements in digital technologies have made certain creative practices seem archaic. However, the further we move away from the initial invention, the sooner we will







find ourselves looking back: “In Brooklyn you can discover printers who practice traditional typesetting, shops that spin and dye their own yarn, tailors making shirts by hand, restaurants who butcher their own meat and DJs who spin nothing but vinyl”, Steve tells us.

This striving for the roots has always been a trend in filmmaking and as the masses move more and more towards digitalization, there remain the unsatisfied few who, reluctant to give up so quickly, continue to pursue analogue film against the current trend.

Paolo Davanzo, founder and executive director of the Echo Park Film Center in Los Angeles, sees a parallel in the music world: “When CDs entered the scene, music lovers thought vinyl would die. But records have had resurgence in popularity in recent years. Analogue film will have a similar journey. Not as popular, but still relevant and beautiful for years to come.”

By continuing to demand access to vinyl, record collectors and vinyl junkies took away the power of corporate record labels and

changed the course of musical history.

“MP3 players allow someone to store 100,000 songs in the palm of their hand, but vinyl is still here because there is a community large enough that understands the difference”, says Steve Cossman. However, “the consumer public was faced with a choice and they chose to sacrifice quality and craftsmanship for a convenient, cheaper product.”

One important distinction between analogue music and analogue filmmaking is the means of distribution – records are meant to be distributed and listened to at home, handled by the listener. Film on the other hand is often only recorded on film and then consumed digitally. This process tends to alienate audiences from developing the sort of physical relationship that is possible when handling a record. The vinyl record is a tangible object, taken from the sleeve, put on the turntable and spun. But the normal viewer can’t drop a needle on an analogue film like he can on an LP. Film produced through analogue processes often ends up being transferred to another medium for distribution. It requires

specialized equipment and knowledge in order to be enjoyed. MONO NO AWARE, Cherry Kino, and the Echo Park Film Center each play a role in making this specialized knowledge accessible to the community by organizing filmmaking workshops, screenings and exhibitions.

ANALOGUE EDUCATION IN A DIGITAL AGE

So what do you learn, if you are lucky enough to sit down on Steve Cossman’s filmschool desk? “MONO NO AWARE filmmaking workshops are really geared to empower the participants. We begin by teaching where to obtain equipment, how to choose what is right for you, then move onto lighting, lenses, how to mix the chemistry to develop your own film, then onto post production and how to edit and project the film.”

Besides the technical part that Steve is talking about, Paolo Davanzo points out a nearly psychological, life changing aspect of his workshops: “It makes you slow down. It makes you touch, feel, think. All these are elements that are missing in our hyper-media age of making videos on our phones!”

Martha Jurksaitis from Cherry Kino underlines another important aspect of analogue filmmaking workshops: They are a protection from extinction. If it weren't for the efforts of the "Impossible Project" Polaroid film would still be extinct. The production stop of Kodachrome, a color reversal film that Paul Simon has even sung about, proves that analogue film faces the same threat. Its survival, according to Martha, depends on certain factors: "Know-how, availability of raw materials, demand and whether chemistry remains available for processing or not". The extinction factor though, does also have a positive side: "Analogue film material will become more precious and will be treated more economically, so that imagery is originated on film but worked with and exhibited almost entirely digitally. This excites me, because often when materials and tools become scarce, great innovations take place."

This sense of optimism for the future of analogue film is echoed by Steve Cossman through MONO NO AWARE's annual international exhibition. It shows the work of contemporary artists using Super 8, 16mm or 35mm film, often combined with other art forms such as dance, theater, music or storytelling. "We believe there is a magic in seeing the film projected as a print. There is a presence a poet has reading his/her own writing. There is a feeling that resonates in your chest when seeing a band live. For these reasons we are encouraging live music, performance and audio to expand the cinematic experience beyond the screen."

Jodie Mack's interactive "Bike-Cycle" zoe-trope exemplifies this spirit. Mack repurposed an out of date exercise bicycle and transformed it into a pedal powered cinema piece. Using the basic foundation of what a moving image is, the piece playfully integrates the spectator and makes him realize: Film is easy. There is an image, black bars, light, and movement – put them together and you have got your own movie.

MONO NO AWARE, Echo Park Film Center, Cherry Kino and similar groups offer glimpses of hope for present and future filmmakers. They are a true example of the community deciding against the market-economy. Their message is clear – they want film. They want Super 8, 16mm and 35mm film. They want it to be available to anyone and everyone who is interested. As the existing infrastructure collapses around them, these non-profit organizations will keep making movies and they will share them with friends, neighbors, lovers and strangers. ≠

For more information on film cooperatives in your location check out filmlabs.org

mononoawarefilm.com

echoparkfilmcenter.org

cherrykino.blogspot.com

