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The Black Wave and Marxist Revisionism

THE VIOLENT BREAKUP of the multiethnic, multicultural Yugoslav state and the wars fought on its territory are clear symptoms of aggressive ethnonationalism becoming the dominant ideological model in the region. Contrary to the fashionable views about the "ancient" Balkan hatreds, however, this disintegrative model was in no way predestined to overwhelm the Yugoslav society but rather developed as a direct consequence of the complex political struggles in it. Although the flames of nationalism fully flooded the region in the 1990s, during the mid and late 1980s they were carefully and patiently nurtured by the "ethnically concerned" intellectual and cultural elites (the two key events in this respect being the appearance in 1986 of the "Memorandum," charted by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and in 1987 of the "Contributions to the Slovenian National Programme," written by sixteen individually signed authors and published in the magazine *Nova Revija*; both signaled the legitimation of open, public promotion of ethnocentric national platforms and thus the beginning of organized political-ideological contestation of the existing Yugoslav federal order).[1] The emergence of these nationalist leaderships—whose popularity grew ever more rapidly as the decade of the 1980s approached its end—were, in turn, predicated on the gradual dissolution of the socialist ideology and its sociopolitical structure in the country, the visibility of which process became ever more

prominent after the death of Josip Broz Tito in 1980. In other words, Yugoslavia did not die because of its multiethnic, multicultural composition. It did not die, as the now prevalent ethnoessentialist discourses would have it, because it represented an artificial construct, a "prisonhouse of nations." Rather, the death of the Yugoslav nation is directly linked with a certain "deadlock" of politics, with a failure to uphold the political identity of the federation. Amidst the wider context of state-socialism's demise in the late 1980s Eastern Europe—at the twilight of the cold war era—Yugoslav republics and republican authorities were unable to reach an agreement about the need and ways to reform the federal order. As a consequence of this failure to politically and economically revise the existing socialist system, the reactionary populist and organicist mechanisms of social control were transposed to, and activated in, the realms of ethnicity and culture, as pillars of new social "stability," of the new collective identities.

Latinka Perović, political historian (and until the early 1970s a high-ranking communist official in Serbia, who, because of her reformist orientation, eventually came in conflict with the Titoist hard line), succinctly explains the immediate causes and dynamics of the Yugoslav breakup:

> Yugoslavia spent the whole decade after Josip Broz Tito's death in a deep inertia, founded upon the fear of uncertainty. The first encouragement of reform came from Slovenia. Three types of reform were suggested: economic, political, and reform of the party. In Serbia, all these suggestions were marked as breaking-up the ruling communist party's unity, and therefore the unity of the state itself. In other words, as separatism. They were answered with the "anti-bureaucratic revolution." . . . After the proposals for a confederation and an asymmetrical federation—as forms of maintaining state unity, without giving up the economic and political reforms—were turned down, Slovenia took the path of parting, that is leaving Yugoslavia. Having remained faithful to state socialism and the formula of centralist federation, immanent to all multi-national one-party states, Serbia continued its "anti-bureaucratic revolution" with arms.[2]

According to this author's analysis, it is, then, the "conceptual differences as regards the social model" for the federation in the post-Tito era that lie at the basis of Yugoslav disintegration. Significantly, however,

these differences would increasingly and, ultimately, almost exclusively come to be viewed by all sides as ethnonational in nature.

Certain aspects of the dynamic underlying what in the 1980s became a major crisis of Yugoslav state socialism may, to some extent, be seen as structurally related to the political turbulences of the late 1960s and the early 1970s. At this time the tension between, on the one hand, the reformist initiatives of the regional socialist leaderships in a number of Yugoslav republics and, on the other hand, the rigid, conservative reaction to these initiatives by the federal authorities initially manifested itself.[3] It is with the cinema of this period that the present chapter is concerned.

New Yugoslav Film

> To be making a modern film means nothing other than incorporating symbols into the structure of events in such a manner that they do not hurt the eye with their intrusive meaning, but make the viewer discover, in their overlapping and mutual entanglement, the multi-faceted possibilities of meaning, dependent upon how far one can reach with their incorporation into the whole. "Ha," the doubtful ones will say, "so novi film is a riddle that I am supposed to solve, the trap out of which I am supposed to escape." In some sense this is true.
> ***Dušan Stojanović***

Yugoslav cinema, like cinema in other East-Central European countries of "really existing socialism" (Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, etc.), was nationalized after the Second World War. During the so-called administrative period of the late 1940s, regional centers of production were established in all Yugoslav republics (Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Montenegro), the infrastructure of the film industry was intensively being developed, and first schools for training professional film cadres were founded in the cities of Belgrade and Zagreb. The first feature produced in the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia was Vjekoslav Afrić's *Slavica* (1947), which depicted the Partisan forces battling the fascist Italian army at the Adriatic coast (fig. 1.1).

FIGURE 1.1 *Slavica* (Vjekoslav Afrić, 1947)

The rigid cultural and artistic doctrine of "socialist realism"—also known as "Zhdanovism" (which developed in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and moved into Eastern Europe after the war)—did not last very long in Yugoslavia, even though ideological supervision of culture by the political authorities remained in effect even after its demise. The prescriptive set of "socialist realist" rules—which demanded that artists depict the socialist reality programmatically and idealistically—began to be gradually abandoned toward the end of the 1940s, even earlier than, say, in Poland, where it started to wane around the time of Stalin's death (1953). In 1948 Tito confronted Stalin and declared that the country would not develop under the Soviet dictate but would, instead, pursue its own "autonomous path toward socialism." After 1950, this autonomy developed under the sign of the project of "socialist self-management," conceived as enabling the working class to directly participate in socio-economic decision making and presented as a progressive alternative to the Stalinist deformations of the true Marxist-Leninist objectives.

(In practice Tito, the state, and the Communist Party leadership still acted as final political arbiters, but they exercised power in a more relaxed fashion.) In the "self-managed" Yugoslav film industry (as elsewhere), "workers' councils" were thus introduced as decision-making bodies overseeing film production, distribution, and exhibition, while the creative personnel associated with the process of filmmaking (directors, cinematographers, screenwriters) were given the status of freelance professionals.

Throughout the 1950s, war themes—the struggle against fascist occupation, and the communist-led revolution (without a doubt, the brightest spots in the modern history of *all* South Slavs)—strongly prevailed as the key source of inspiration for film authors. The impressive level of emotional and psychological complexity toward which the still young and developing Yugoslav cinema was already aspiring was clearly announced in such intimate and tragic dramas as Branko Bauer's *Don't Turn Around, Son* (1956; about a father who is killed just before he and his young son manage to join the Partisan guerilla fighters), and France Štiglic's *The Ninth Circle* (1960; a love story about a Croat man and a Jewish woman, set in the wartime Nazi satellite, the Independent State of Croatia). On the other hand, Veljko Bulajić's *The Train Without a Schedule* (1959) brought a neorealist-inspired sensibility to the subject of economic hardship in the immediate postwar years, while the same director's later production *Kozara* (1962) set the standard that many subsequent works in the epic genre of Partisan war film would long aspire to meet.

The 1960s, frequently referred to as the "golden age" of Yugoslav cinema, saw a true outburst of creativity. The decade witnessed a proliferation of films by talented young authors who, working under the sign of individual expression and aesthetic experimentation, broke out of the thus far rarely disputed ideological framework maintained by the socialist state. Finding both inspiration and support for their artistic inclinations among the abundant innovative tendencies of the recent international cinema (above all the Italian neorealism and the French Nouvelle Vague), Aleksandar Petrović, Boštjan Hladnik, Živojin Pavlović, Dušan Makavejev, Ante Babaja, Vatroslav Mimica, Kokan Rakonjac, Krsto Papić, Matjaž Klopčić, Bato Čengić, Želimir Žilnik, and others offered in their films the taste of what would be designated "novi jugoslovenski

film" (New Yugoslav Film) but subsequently—as a consequence of an ideological campaign launched against some of these filmmakers by the political-cultural establishment—also became known (in certain of its incarnations) as the "black wave" of Yugoslav cinema.

The 1960s were a dynamic period in Yugoslavia's social and political life, characterized by developments in the theory and practice of its project of socialist self-management. Associated, as Daniel Goulding points out, with other progressive trends of the period—loosening and decentralization of the state's political control, economic reform, increased democratization of the social sphere—New Film "claimed for itself the right to serve as a critic of all existing conditions" and "to be a conscience—often an unavoidably somber one—of the land, the nation, the society, and the individuals that comprise it."[4] Importantly, although often strongly critical of the concrete social, political, and cultural manifestations of Yugoslav socialism, the views of these filmmakers were for the most part not opposed to socialist ideas as such. They were, however, opposed to ideological dogmatism and reification and were committed to a critique of the "unquestionable" collective national mythology promoted by the Yugoslav state and pertaining to the National War of Liberation (1941–45), the revolutionary struggle of the Yugoslav peoples, and the nature and functioning of the Yugoslav socialist model. Thus, for instance, Živojin Pavlović, one of the foremost representatives of the New Film, had the following to say about the epic Partisan war films, classic instruments of ideological propaganda in the hands of the socialist establishment: "Those who here spoke about the war by way of the celluloid . . . did not scold history, they beautified it, but in a most disgusting way. . . . In Yugoslav cinema, various forms of un-truth permanently replace each other. . . . Quasi-poetics replaces quasi-epics, quasi-drama replaces quasi-psychology, and quasi-mythologization of history replaces quasi-documentation. Instead of art about the revolution, we have revolutionary kitsch."[5]

The social and political critique of the existing socialist system and its ruling elite, however, did not represent the New Film authors' sole, or even primary, ambition.[6] In no small measure, this critical dimension was, in fact, a quality generated out of a desire to assert the autonomy of the subjective truth and of the independent authorial vision (even if,

as was often the case, the filmmaker chose to produce "ambiguous images," to speak in "open cinematic metaphors").[7] It was born, inevitably as it were, out of that "valuable characteristic of the new Yugoslav film," recognized by film theorist Dušan Stojanović, in the fact that "on the philosophical, ideological, and stylistic planes, it [the New Film] offers a possibility—which in practice it realizes on a daily basis—to replace one collective mythology with endless individual mythologies."[8] "I dare say," wrote Stojanović in 1965,

> that in the present historical moment our new film is not "socially engaged." After Babac's, Živanović's, Rakonjac's, Petrović's films, one may say in good conscience that, instead of that famous "social engagement," our cinema is ruled by a free, independent, personal, even anarchist, spirit. We lived to see our film authors become individually engaged and "nothing more," we lived to see them have courage . . . to express their personal opinion about anything, regardless of whether that opinion will be understood by some as "socially positive" or "socially negative," "constructive" or "destructive," "engaged" or seemingly disinterested, optimistic or nihilistic. Free creative mind is gradually winning over the bureaucratized mind, the latter losing the cover which hides dogmatic contents, inherited over the long years of preaching to the Yugoslav arts.[9]

Generally speaking, in many of its aspects praised by Stojanović (ethical, theoretical, practical), the New Film orientation approaches—and therefore asks to be addressed in relation to—the set of sociopolitical concerns engaged around the same time by the Yugoslav Marxist humanist intellectuals associated with the influential journal *Praxis* (Gajo Petrović, Milan Kangrga, Mihailo Marković, Rudi Supek). And as a result of the political and aesthetic radicalism of his cinema, Dušan Makavejev is perhaps *the* New Film auteur whose work most clearly illustrates this link. The rest of this chapter will therefore (1) explore ways in which Makavejev envisions, both theoretically and practically, in two of his best-known works, *Innocence Unprotected* (1968) and *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* (1971), a "liberated mode" of spectatorial interaction with his films; and (2) compare such forms of interaction to the spectatorial effects produced by two other "black wave" authors—Živojin Pavlović and Lazar Stojanović, in their films *When I Am Dead and Pale* (1969) and *Plastic Jesus* (1971).