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The Rats Woke Up – On Figures of Dissent in Belgrade's Underbelly in Pavlović's Vision

Abstract

The characters of Živojin Pavlović's seminal film The Rats Woke Up (Buđenje Pacova, 1967), regularly discussed in the context of the Yugoslav Black Wave cinema, offer significant and very intriguing figures of dissent. The film depicts misfits, bottom-dwellers, and dissidents living on the margins of society in the largest and capital city of Belgrade at a time when Black Wave authors have been breaking some new grounds for Yugoslav cinema and influencing artists well after the movement became a part of history. This essay concentrates on the characters and their interaction, the complexity of which suggests the complexity of Pavlović's criticism of everyday life and institutions in the 1960s Yugoslavia.

Keywords: Živojin Pavlović, The Rats Woke Up, Black Wave, Belgrade, figures of dissent, film criticism, Yugoslav cinema

1. Introduction

Historical studies of socialist Yugoslav cinema often place special emphasis on the Black Wave tendency of the 1960s and early 1970s (Goulding);[1] sometimes even considering it to be a proper movement. Owing to the Black Wave cinema's international success accompanied by film reviews and scholarly studies, as well as several major festival awards, it is deemed as one of the lasting cultural legacies of socialist Yugoslavia, a country dissolved at the beginning of the 1990s. The importance of cinema in Yugoslavia's popular culture is extensively discussed in Radina Vučetić's book Koka-kola socijalizam (Coca-cola socialism), albeit often from the perspective of western influences, while Greg DeCuire Jr. (2013) discusses the role of "realist" depictions of war and

partisan fight in Yugoslav cinema as a part of the State-Building process, building the consensus around the Yugoslav values. The role of the Black cinema, however, points to the complexity of the cinematic institution, wide enough to embrace imported films, local cinematic populism, and (at least for a length of time) the Black Wave cinema (Vučetić 142-66).[2]

Some of these films originally received unfavorable reception in local political circles and media outlets supporting the establishment, such as Belgrade's daily newspapers Politika and Borba, film journal Filmska kultura from Zagreb and similar publications. However, they still managed to receive important awards at the Pula Film Festival, the central cinematic event in Yugoslavia, as well as accolades from more politically independent film critics. Films and authors of this provenance, including Živojin Pavlović and his work, faced scrutiny and suffered from accusations of anti-government and anti-socialist sentiments (Hamblin 28-29; Levi, Raspad 75-76; DeCuir, "Black Wave" 87-89), which is well-documented in a somewhat personal and poetic account in Bogdan Tirnanić's 2008 book.[3] However, in an ironic twist of fate, this ambiguous reception can actually serve as a successful argument in favor of the assumption that Yugoslav society of the period was unique and inspired very significant developments in arts, although the very creative tendencies were accompanied by chaotic political reactions. The cinema was important for Yugoslav society, among other things, as a vessel of propaganda, but Yugoslav society was in turmoil, and the ways of funding and controlling the cinema became more complex and decentralized, becoming less strict in the process (Škrabalo, 315-18).

The political accusations could become quite dangerous for the artists or their careers. Lazar Stojanović, a budding director at the time, got incarcerated for his graduation film Plastic Jesus, which was a unique development, while his professors, distinguished Black Wave artists Živojin Pavlović and Aleksandar Petrović, lost their teaching positions (Šijan, Razgovori 46; Polimac 68, 82). Film historian Nebojša Jovanović claims that the dichotomy of regime vs oppositional cinema can overshadow the aesthetics and other values of "regime" cinema (Jovanović, "We Need" 284-90), but in spite of his (often quite convincing) challenges to the traditional historical approaches, the Black Wave cinema still offers a compelling viewing even for the twenty-first-century audience. Pavlović is one of the authors whose international success (such as The Silver Bear at the Berlin

Festival for The Rats Woke Up) contributed to the international reputation of Yugoslav films, making them part of the cinema canon.[4]

2. Pavlović and the Black Wave Cinema

Some of Pavlović's feature films (like The Ambush and The Manhunt) concentrate on the historical WWII period and its immediate aftermath, offering a counter-narrative to the official model of Yugoslav revolutionary history in cinema (the heroic revolution and the birth of people's government), most poignantly presented in The Battle of Neretva and The Battle of Sutjeska (Jovanović, "We Need" 284-89; Levi, Raspad 30).[5] However, in other films, Pavlović presents the viewer with graphic and unflattering images of the contemporary, economically rising Yugoslav socialist society. When I Am Dead and Gone and The Rats Woke Up belong to this group of Pavlović's films. Although there are differences between the images of provincial despair in When I Am Dead and Gone and the images of the underbelly of a modernizing capital city in The Rats Woke Up, it is far more important to look into their compatibility. Both films deal with the impoverished, desperate, and destitute people on the margins of society, where socialism is barely, if at all, visible on the horizon of possible outcomes of social change.

Džimi Barka (interpreted by the charismatic and fresh star Dragan Nikolić), the rambling rascal and the singing hero of When I Am Dead and Gone, actually wants to achieve pop stardom and become a hero for the young audience, in spite of very obvious limits to his musical talents.[6] He even attempts to sing rock and roll music in a hall filled with fans of this new, profoundly western genre within socialist society. On the other hand, more middle-aged Belgrade denizen Velimir Bamberg Pacolino (played by Slobodan Perović with a lot of nuances), the central character of The Rats Woke Up, is neither optimistic nor ambitious, which may be one of the reasons why he survives in the end (Barka's life violently ends in an outhouse).

Bamberg regularly participates in the bourgeoisie cultural rituals, including reading books on the Hungarian Revolution and going to choir rehearsals that celebrate and continue the pre-socialist Belgrade traditions, where he is not only a singer but also an ardent activist. However, Bamberg also tries to participate in the black market and does a low-prestige and financially unrewarding

menial job. The fact that Bamberg is making his livelihood toiling at a sewing machine produces a highly unusual image for the male cinematic protagonist of the era. This makes his social position even more precarious – in addition to everything else that troubles him, even his masculinity seems to be in jeopardy, perhaps motivating him to behave in a traditionally masculine manner with the women he meets.

The black market itself is a phenomenon equally present in the urban underbellies of the cities of the East and West, and not something specific of socialist societies or the 1960s in general. Yet, since the protagonist and other characters, filmed in unappealing black and white photography, live in squalor and deal with crime and destitution on a daily basis, it begs the question as to whether anything changed in the 1940s-60s Yugoslav society after all the work of the Yugoslav state apparatus and party activists. More specifically and in line with the thematic nexus of the majority of the Black Wave films, we could ask whether anything changed in Serbia under socialism.[7] Socialist Yugoslavia wanted to create a new, just society. However, after watching Pavlović's films, especially if they are taken to mirror certain aspects of reality, as is a common assumption, the answers to both questions seem to be negative.

Since some of the Black Wave films came across quite serious political obstacles in their Yugoslav cinematic distribution (some productions were halted altogether, partly through political pressure on film companies),[8] The Rats Woke Up was wisely presented at the Berlin Film Festival prior to potentially provocative Yugoslav distribution, to prevent politically motivated suppression of the film (Polimac 45). The success at the festival can be explained by the film's quality, but also by the fact that the Berlin Festival was well-known and actually designed as a meeting point between different political and cultural systems in then strictly divided Europe. Interestingly enough, The Rats Woke Up received a similar award (for best director) at the Pula Film Festival in Yugoslavia.

Pavlović's film depicts the underclass and dissidents living on the margins of society in Yugoslavia's capital city of Belgrade. Nevertheless, the erotic accents, physical and mental deviations from the moral and cinematic norms of the era (and of the films of the previous generation of filmmakers) are also reminiscent of more radical films of the same period produced by other national cinemas based on different socio-historical circumstances. One such example is John Waters's visions of the underbelly of American society in his films from the 1960s and 1970s,

focusing on Baltimore (admittedly, not a US metropolis) in the state of Maryland.[9] The trash cinema heroes dwell in the society similar to Bamberg's.

Although Pavlović's and Waters's oeuvres are aesthetically different, there are still some similarities in narrative procedures, when, for instance, Bamberg frantically wanders the dirty streets similar to the movement of John Waters's heroes (Divine aka Babs and her family) in Pink Flamingos. The plot is either underdeveloped or insignificant compared to the strong impact of the scenes on the viewer. Pavlović, like Waters, also depicts low-quality and trashy living quarters, with characters who are both creators as well as consumers of trash culture (including music, photography, cinema), although Pavlović himself does not make trash cinema. Nevertheless, a similar turn towards the margins of society in Waters's and Pavlović's films, with similar scenery, fixation on the eroticism and the ideological stance of some characters, might very well inspire serious re-examination of the alleged profound difference between socialist and capitalist societies, when both produce subversive and dissenting art with characters presented in such a similar setting. Moreover, some of Želimir Žilnik's and Dušan Makavejev's films, especially their characters and mise-en-scène, might prove to be even more similar to the films made under different circumstances in the United States.[10]

The squalor of the rooms Pavlović's heroes inhabit, the dirt of the building and the surrounding area where the erotic photos are taken, the manner in which the hero lives in general, do not represent the apex of the 'unpleasant' cinema on an international scale. In addition to Waters's films, it is worth mentioning Ettore Scola's Down and Dirty. The examples can be found in many production models.[11] However, Pavlović's artistic vision remains truthful to realism as it draws on very convincing, lifelike images, while at the same time presenting the poetic vision of the ugly. Unlike Waters, Pavlović assembles and combines a great deal of people, movements, actions, and sounds in almost every shot in The Rats Woke Up (and some other of his films), making his cinematic world very rich, boiling with life, with characters barely avoiding bumping into and falling over each other. Bamberg and other characters are sometimes reacting to the noise and the stench of the environment, but more often than not, they merely move around with a simple aim – to earn some money one way or another and to satisfy their basest, carnal desires.

Živojin Pavlović, quite a prolific fiction and non-fiction writer, in addition to being a leading cinema auteur, wrote about the appeal of the disgusting, using a publicly exhibited graphic photograph of the birth of a baby as an example. Pavlović concludes his general musings with a very concrete anthropological claim about the basic equality of the educated and the sophisticated, on the one hand, and the so-called small (uneducated) man, on the other. As Pavlović maintains, the sperm of a man of a refined musical taste and that of a man who enjoys the lowest forms of music (and pop culture in general) will end up in the same place – either in a vagina or in a toilet (Pavlović, O odvratnom 95). Pavlović continues to elaborate on other issues pertinent to his poetics in the book entitled On the Disgusting (O odvratnom) published in Belgrade not long after his best 1960s films.

The key topics of Pavović's earlier writing seem to be present to a certain degree in his later criticism of high culture as one detached from the reality of life and, more importantly, from the reality of death in its promotion of longevity, as argued by van de Port (12). This particular point of view, however, might also be related to the 1990s political situation in the Balkans and the relationship of certain Serbian and other intellectuals to the voices from the West advocating preservation of life as a foremost value. Many critics and thinkers from the region tended to reject in entirety the concerns of the West; instead, they concentrated on their local political and ideological perspectives and problems.

3. The Nature of Pavlović's Cinematic Dissent

So, what is the nature of dissent in Pavlović's and other Black Wave films? Although the term Black Wave was allegedly coined by Serbian journalist Nebojša Glišić (Tirnanić 84) in order to mark and denigrate socially critical aspect of a growing number of Yugoslav films, some historians and critics, such as American Serbian film scholar Greg DeCuir Jr. and American film historian Sarah Hamblin, discuss the Black Wave as a phenomenon directly linked to the tenants of the Marxist philosophy. According to DeCuir, "[t]he Yugoslav Black Wave film is a polemical film and rhetoric – the Methodical Marxist rhetoric of a ruthless critique of all existing conditions – is one of its key aesthetic concerns" (DeCuir, "Black Wave" 85).[12]

With that in mind, it is worth asking how well certain Black Wave films fit into the same categories since, similarly to other waves and schools in the history of cinema, the Black Wave was hardly a homogenous group of artists and films. The critics tend to promote the view of a coherent Black Wave, as Tirnanić explains in his 2008 book. Even though Sarah Hamblin's explanation of the Black Wave poetics may seem convincing since she deals with Makavejev's films and with Pavlović's The Enemy (The Ambush is, perhaps, another example that could be included in her Black Wave-Marxist interpretation), the grim worlds of The Rats Woke Up and When I Am Dead and Gone seem to go beyond the critique of society from Marxist or any other well-defined perspective.

The Rats Woke Up opens with a scene of an unappealing image of a large rodent being killed by a cleaning lady in some derelict historical hall used for cultural events, still messy from a recently held party. The choir rehearsal is seen in the very same shot with a dying rat, which may seem to be an overtly simplistic clue for inferring a cinematic statement of direct symbolism. Regardless of that, such juxtaposition of high and low motifs must have had a clear and strong effect on the viewers of the era. It is also hardly accidental that we meet the anti-heroic central character of the film as one of the participants of the choir rehearsal. The cleaning lady, immediately after killing the rat, enters the hall where the choir prepares for a celebratory concert. They are all crammed together in a world of this film, alongside another group of people slowly removing the decorations from the hall (providing Pavlović with an opportunity to subtly display his mastery of cinematic mise-an-scène).

A symbolic interpretation of the entire film (where rats reappear on many levels, including the protagonist's nickname) can also be seen from the title that was allegedly inspired by verses from T. S. Eliot's Wasteland (Pavlović, Dva razgovora 23);[13] quoted at the front page of Gordan Mihić and Ljubiša Kozomara's film script (which is not something an average viewer can be aware of without additional research; Jovanović, "Velikani"). Wasteland is not only a conservative, non-Marxist piece of writing but also, from the Marxist point of view, a sign of the decadent western culture. It is important to take this into consideration if Pavlović's film is to be interpreted through the lens of Marxist filmmaking.

While rummaging through the dark and dusty basement, where the portraits of antebellum benefactors are left to rot, Velimir Bamberg, nick-named Rat-boy (Pacolino), tells other singers that his grandfather, Haji-Milutin Bamberg, founded the choir, regardless of what other people say, thus trying to establish his own sense of worth. However, at the very end of The Rats Woke Up, the viewers who can read the Serbian Cyrillic script clearly see that another person is being celebrated as the founder on the memorial plaque that looks like a headstone. The choir is singing to honor that person and not Pacolino's grandfather. This means that Bamberg's aspiration for a dignified family heritage is denied to him, just like love (with the disappearance of a neighbor played by Dušica Žegarac), friendship (with the death of Krmanoš, played by Pavle Vuisić), and happiness, in general, are also denied to him.

The scene with the choir singing in memory of its real founder is placed at the very end of the film. Not long before that, there is a scene with a grotesque spectacle of a group of drunken people (including Bamberg and a prostitute) chasing and trying to kill a rat in an abandoned open-air cinema. The relationship to the past is obviously one of the most prominent features of the film – the glory of the pre-revolutionary (pre-WWII) culture is seen in traces, as a faint remnant, with the choir members exchanging vulgarities (the lead singer tells off the elderly conductor quite crassly) and the portraits of the choir's benefactors rotting in the dark basement among rats lurking in the dark. Bamberg's revolutionary past has also been denigrated; a dialogue reveals he was a pre-war communist (a lower-to-mid tier partisan-communist leader), who became a dissident because he could not accept Josip Broz Tito's 1948 shift away from a close alliance with the Soviet Union. Bamberg, therefore, has nothing to show from his own past achievements.

Instead of enjoying the fruits of his own and his ancestors' accomplishments, Bamberg is being haunted by the past – a former Stalinist comrade Lale (played by Severin Bijelić),[14] who served a prison sentence for his political transgression (declining to reveal Bamberg's involvement to the authorities), now has several shady professions, including taking pornographic pictures![15] Lale blackmails Bamberg into joining him in his smuggling enterprise. The fact that Bamberg refuses, at the same time collecting money for his sister's medical trip to the sea, brings him closer to the focus of the bearded and shabby secret policeman Pera Udba (played by Ljubomir Ćipranić; UDBA was the name of Yugoslav secret police). However, the secret policeman is primarily monitoring

Lale, who is presented as a prominent petty criminal. Hence, in the final ironical twist, Lale's serious threats to Bamberg are resolved by the authorities. Pera mortally wounds Lale during his attempted escape, delivering Bamberg from at least some of his predicaments. It is interesting that in spite of his previous threats to expose Bamberg's role in Stalinist activism, Lale provides some sort of ethics by refusing to leak his name to Pera, although it would probably have improved his own precarious position. The constant movement of camera around the premises (similar to the camerawork in other classic Pavlović's films) makes the cinematic world more convincing, hinting at the documentarist approach of catching the events taking place regardless of the camera's presence.

It is also worth noting that the manner in which the secret policeman comports himself and passes his time hiding in the bushes next to a landfill does not meet the viewers' expectations of the threatening agents of the oppressive state. He reads Politikin zabavnik, a highly popular magazine primarily aimed at children.[16] This might be interpreted as a simple joke, often missed by foreign viewers, but it is just another comical element in a series of comic enrichments of otherwise a quite depressing tale of the former greatness and present-day squalor. To see a dangerous policeman reading such a journal is genuinely funny, and the constant voyeuristic streaks exhibited by several male characters (including Bamberg) are treated as a running gag, while the scene where a prostitute (played by Mirjana Blašković) evicts her parents from the flat in order to have sex with Bamberg epitomizes black humor. This film is not a dark comedy, but it does contain several humorous scenes, such as when a childish student (played by Milan Jelić)[17] tries to seduce a neighbor, or a scene when Bamberg's in an unexpected fatherly gesture covers the student while he sleeps, while Krmanoš, Bamberg's only close friend, dies at the bathhouse precisely at the moment when he agrees to lend the protagonist some money.

All these historical and humorous elements signal that there is no forward motion for the hero (which is strongly suggested by the final panning from the lost anti-hero and the choir to the wide waters of the Danube meeting the sky) – the past is a repository of illusions and disappointments, definitively gone regardless of feeble attempts to preserve or resurrect it. Bamberg survives but he is no more than a rodent caught in a maze. There seems to be nothing fundamentally Marxist in the dark view of life and history presented in Pavlović's film – it is more nihilistic, while anarchism

might be just one of the possible consequences of such a worldview. Resignation seems equally acceptable and appropriate.

Another smaller subplot of the film is also quite indicative of this approach to the dominant norms of the officially Marxist and socialist country, deeply repressive in its view on sexuality.[18] The aforementioned student happens to be involved in a homosexual relationship with the pornography collector Milorad (played by Milivoje Mića Tomić) despite the young man's obvious interest in female companionship. The incriminating photographs of queer intimacy are uncovered by accident when Bamberg looks into a book on the Hungarian Revolution. Although the twenty-first-century viewer might lean towards the student's bisexuality or gender fluidity to interpret this relationship, the possibilities of sexual innuendos in the 1960s Balkan context should be borne in mind. Due to their age difference, as well as Milorad's relative affluence, subtle dandyism,[19] and willingness to pay for the procurement of erotic and pornographic materials, it is likely that some sort of commercial exchange may be at play in this relationship, with the student earning from the covert liaison.

Milorad's interest in high culture, trashy photography, and self-grooming makes him easily comparable to some of John Waters's characters, such as Raymond Marble (David Lochary), the exhibitionist from Pink Flamingos. Although this view of queer identities and sexuality might seem stereotypical and conservative from a contemporary perspective, it is important to notice the cruelty and blackmail Bamberg reverts to in order to avoid giving Milorad the money he has blatantly cheated him out of. Among the deprived and desperate, the most vulnerable ones (queer individuals, for example) will be taken advantage of, without much ethical concerns or fear of retribution. Bamberg seems to be at the bottom of Belgrade society, but Milorad, although more affluent, becomes Bamberg's prey.

Needless to say, it is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify the severity of social criticism in a fiction film. Had Pavlović's film not won the Silver Bear for Best Director award in Berlin, it would have been far more criticized in Yugoslavia. The analysis of Pavlović's work might therefore benefit from a brief comparison to other films, based on Pavle Levi's work (Levi, Raspad 48-50). For example, Pavlović's feature films (The Rats Woke Up, When I'm Dead and Gone) are noted for political references that are discussed in relation to Stojanović's Plastic Jesus, since the rambunctious

editing style of Plastic Jesus (more similar to that of Makavejev's W. R. Mysteries) connects graphic nudity with contemporary and historical political leaders from every side of the ideological spectrum (including Josip Broz Tito, Adolf Hitler, Ante Pavelić and Draža Mihajlović). Plastic Jesus shows both the social elites and the lowest of the low in the society.

However, the approach to Yugoslav and Serbian reality in both films, Pavlović's and Stojanović's, still seems quite comparable. In fact, it is so radical in both films that it would be more useful to view them in the context of the anarchist tradition in art (perhaps starting with Vigo's Zéro de conduite/Zero for Conduct), rather than in the Marxist praxis (Levi, Raspad 61-62), regardless of the fact that despair in Pavlović's film is incongruous with Stojanović's joyful editing kinetics and the always proactive hero Tomislav (played by conceptual artist and filmmaker Tomislav Gotovac), who remains on the move until the moment of his death. Tomislav's optimism in Plastic Jesus seems more of a symptom of insanity. His meaningless death in the end is probably a more direct comment on the reality of existence than his optimism.

There are already studies offering a non-Marxist reading of the Black Wave. Levi quotes a very clear statement by Pavlović, who said at one point that the revolution is an anarchist endeavor with the goal of destroying itself, without a clear objective and agenda. This is clearly at odds with the official Marxist view of the revolution and the establishment of a new (infinitely better) society (Levi, Raspad 50). The author of an artwork is, needless to say, not necessarily correct when s/he judges the impact and the perception of his/her art. However, Pavlović's statement is supported by the visions presented in his films![20]

All this is reminiscent of some of the motifs exploited in The Rats Woke Up. The word 'rat' from the title indicates several things: the hero's nickname, for instance (Pacov, albeit in the endearing form Pacolino), but also frequent hunts for rats, a pest that most certainly troubles people living and working in the old buildings, crammed in squalor. The hunt for rats seems to reverberate the local film. For example, Krsto Papić's The Rat Savior is built around the organization of rat-people taking over a city in the antebellum atmosphere;[21] which is later directly referenced in Zoran Tadić's Third Key, with Krsto Papić making a cameo of a rat catcher in the first scenes of the low-budget supernatural thriller. Later on, Papić made Infection, a less successful remake of his The Rat

Savior, also dealing with rat/human monsters, this time in contemporary post-Yugoslav (and EU-oriented) Croatian society.

4. The Black Wave and Beyond

Later Yugoslav and Serbian feature films, occasionally classified as dark comedies (Balkan Spy, Strangler vs. Strangler, Made in Serbia and The Life and Death of a Porno Gang) often show a strikingly clear influence of the Black Wave poetics and Pavlović's oeuvre, particularly in the depiction of the city squalor and provincial gloom. For instance, the anti-hero of Balkan Spy is a Stalinist trying to adapt to a new environment, while the motif of the choir that he detests can be seen as an homage to The Rats Woke Up. Even the notorious Spasojević's shock-feature A Serbian Film (2010), often classified as horror, can be seen as belonging to this tradition.

In the specific context of the socialist Yugoslav era, it is easy to notice that in Šijan's popular masterpiece The Strangler vs. Strangler, the anti-hero Pera Mitić (played by Taško Načić), a carnation street merchant, lives in squalor comparable to the living arrangements of Pavlović's characters (including Bamberg), while in Who's Singin' Over There?, the elegant provincial singer (played by Dragan Nikolić), is a direct reference to Pavlović's When I Am Dead and Gone, a film focusing on the exploits of an untalented singer played by the very same actor, a recognizable star of Yugoslav cinema and television at the time when Šijan's film was produced. Many other actors are shared by Pavlović's, Makavejev's and later films, but this is hardly surprising in a relatively small cinematic production.

Since sexuality is such an important part of Pavlović's, Makavejev's, or Stojanović's films, with almost always present violence, the vagaries of sex and violence in The Life and Death of a Porno Gang and A Serbian Film seem to be a logical continuation of Yugoslav and Serbian tradition of dissent (via naturalist poetics of the ugly and the marginalized). Đorđević, the director of The Life and Death of a Porno Gang, previously made a (semi)documentary Made in Serbia, which dealt directly with the porno industry, making his later fictional film a logical extension of his gloomy view of Serbian society.

What the Black Wave films (the Marxist-oriented ones and others) have in common with the later critical cinema from Serbia is the unashamed refusal to accept the societal norms. In an era when the society went through major changes, dissenting directors went even further than Pavlović or Stojanović in their depiction of rape, murder, and other deviant social behaviors. However, the manner in which Pacolino's life is saved (or the manner in which Tomislav from Plastic Jesus deals with sexuality, dreaming of filming violent transgressive sexual acts) clearly shows that the tradition of dissent goes a long way and has many forms in Serbian, Yugoslav, and post-Yugoslav cinema. It has become increasingly different to shock the audiences in the 1990s and 2000s, after the latest spells of wars in the region and the proliferation of international films packed with violence. The radical nature of The Life and Death of a Porno Gang (and Made in Serbia) therefore seems to be a logical development. The images Tomislav from Plastic Jesus merely discussed as something he would like to film (the most horrible violent sexual acts) have become the cinematic reality of post-Yugoslav cinema![22]

Since the Black Wave cinema is widely considered to be the highest point in the regional film history, at least as regards feature films, it is hardly surprising that it has become one of the foundations if not the foundation of the future anti-mainstream cinematic tendencies, sometimes with actors directly referencing the tradition of the Black Wave and the first generation of its scions (Slobodan Šijan is the most prominent example). Certain less prominent films from Croatia-based directors have also attempted to build upon the grotesque characters and the comical stemming from the Black Wave tradition, such as Orešković's Simon Magus, Vitez's Shooting Stars or Ličina's The Last Serb in Croatia![23] The figures of dissent in more recent post-Yugoslav films, however, can hardly be considered identical to their Black Wave inspirations, regardless of their similarities, and this seems to be a matter quite suitable for some future discussion.

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Zéro de conduit. Directed by Jean Vigo, Paris: Argui-Films, 1933.

[1] In addition to a survey published by historian Petar Volk from Belgrade in the 1980s, Goulding's book is still the only comprehensive attempt at a history of Yugoslav (fiction) cinema.

[2] Pavle Levi points to the exhibition of American modern art as a jolt for kick-starting modernist art in Yugoslavia (Dušan Makavejev, as a critic, was deeply impressed with the exhibition) (Jolted Images 23). For the insight into general Yugoslav relations with the West (and the USA) cf. Jakovina.

[3] Additionally, Tirnanić, DeCuir Jr., and other authors regularly mention that Pavlović, Rakonjac, and Babac's film The City was a unique example of administratively and officially banned Yugoslav feature film (some others were unofficially censored and shelved). Tirnanić was also an actor in Žilnik's seminal Black Wave film Early Works.

[4] The Black Cinema influenced authors however (such as Slobodan Šijan), sometimes worked much closer to the fields of conceptual and performance art (cf. Šijan, Filmus 227-47).

[5] It may be of interest to note that the films of Puriša Đorđević offer different, lyrical, but still critical vision of WWII and the socialist revolution.

[6] Mirrored perhaps in the off-key singing at Bamberg's sister's party in The Rats Woke Up. Nickname Džimi is a local Slavic transcription of English name Jimmy, reflective of the western (particularly Anglophone) influences on Yugoslav culture and society (cf. Vučetić 27-38).

[7] It is often hard to discern local significance (i.e., the significance for Belgrade, for Serbia, for urban vs. rural setting) from Yugoslav-wide significance of the Black Wave. Additional difficulty resides in Yugoslavia's tumultuous history affecting reception of the movement. It is clear, however, that the Black Wave had the strongest roots in Serbian production within Yugoslav cinema, and that it influenced film production in other parts of Yugoslavia.

[8] A very indicative letter from the organized communist workers of the Neoplanta Film Studio, which demands the banning of the Black Wave productions, is quoted in Gilić 118-19.

[9] For the reception of trash cinema, see Mathijs 451–53.

[10] In some Žilnik's films, the characters and actors merge in their sexually transgressive personas (see Marble Ass, or Kenedi is Getting Married). This, in addition to unappealing camerawork and often rough editing, comes quite close to Waters's early works. Kenedi is of Roma ethnicity, but his name is a typical local adaptation of the name Kennedy.

[11] The international emergence of the low-budget gore horror cinema in the 1960s and 1970s can also be considered in this context.

[12] Cf. DeCuir, Yugoslav Black Wave. Both DeCuir Jr. and Hamblin start their respective articles by explaining how the Black Wave critique of socialist Yugoslavia meets the criteria for the real Marxist filmmaking – a radical and merciless dissection of social phenomena, regardless of how the society names and legitimizes itself. Hamblin even explains how some of the Black Wave films, including Pavlović's The Enemy, an intriguing Dostoevsky-inspired Doppelgänger tale, correspond to the critical Yugoslav Praxis School (Hamblin 31-34).

[13] It has, however, proven impossible to connect the alleged Serbian translation to any verses of Wasteland (although rats' alley is mentioned therein). The lines from the film talk about a rat who awaits his awakening, the bell and the sunrise that would give the glow of life, and shine of holiday to the gloom of his eye (Serb. I pacov čeka svoje budjenje/ čeka svoje zvono, čeka prasak sunca /koje bi mutnom sjaju njegovog oka /dao sjaj života i slavu praznika). Milorad is reading these lines to Bamberg and Krmanoš.

[14] The intensity of this excellent actor was put to great advantage in The Ambush as well.

[15] By the twenty-first-century standards, those images would be erotic, rather than pornographic (as opposed to certain parts of Stojanović's Plastic Jesus that are pornographic by any standard). However, this type of a profession and imagery is very surprising for the 1960s Yugoslav film. Moreover, the photoshoot and the pervasive motif of eroticism lead to the conclusion that even more graphic sexuality is taking place, although it is not directly present on the screen.

[16] Founded before WWII, the journal adapted well to socialist Yugoslavia (http://politikin-zabavnik.rs/). The fact that a supporting character (the butcher who wants to marry off his daughter to Bamberg) is an allusion to (Politika's) film critic Milutin Čolić (who supported Yugoslav establishment), is something far too obscure for the wider audience to recognize (Pavlović, Dva

razgovora 24). Želimir Žilnik mocks Čolić in his dystopian feature Pretty Women Passing Through the Town – the heroes come across an old vinyl record by pop singer Zdravko Čolić in a landfill, mistaking him for Milutin Čolić.

[17] An excellent young character actor, Jelić later became a populist screenwriter and director.

[18] This feature of Yugoslav society is a target of the heroine's rage in WR: Mysteries of Organism .

[19] He is the only groomed male character, taking care of his hair with a fishnet in the evenings (in stark contrast to other men in the film). Personal grooming is a well-established shorthand for queer tendencies in Yugoslav cinema and television of the period, continuing deep into the twenty-first century. One of the more striking examples is the queer nationalist hero of Grlić's The Constitution.

[20] It might be significant to notice that Levi also quotes Makavejev's praise of anarchism.

[21] Papić was among very few authors working outside Serbia who were criticized for belonging to the Black Wave (Tirnanić 84).

[22] Tomislav practically equates gay sex (between "two faggots" [dva pedera]) with heterosexual violence, which may raise a few eyebrows. However, in the context of the period, the fact that the film actually shows two men kissing can be considered a progressive, perhaps even a radical cinematic act.

[23] The casting of Jelisaveta Seka Sabljić, an outstanding actress from Šijan's films, in Simon Magus is an obvious example of following the tradition since she was not on the roster of actors hired by the twenty-first-century Croatian film directors, either before or after Simon Magus was screened (with very little impact) at Pula Film Festival and elsewhere in Croatia.

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