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On Yugoslav experimental film and cine  
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**Ana Janevski**

# ‘We can’t promise to do more than experiment.’<sup>1</sup>

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## Ana Janevski

<sup>1</sup> Reply of the KÓD Group, a group of visual artists from Novi Sad, Serbia, to Dušan Makavejev when he invited them, as a selector of a the special programme at the newly established Belgrade Film Festival in 1971, to represent a performative piece.

The starting point for this essay is experimental film in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in all its facets;<sup>2</sup> a cinema that made an important shift in the dominant filmic language of the time and proposed new and different thematic, aesthetic and production paradigms.

In general, experimental film has been separated from the mainstream and for a significant amount of time it has predominantly been considered within the domain of marginal theory and practice. Also, the question of what constitutes ‘experimental film’, as well as settling the parameters of classification, has been one of the most contested questions. Although this could be a subject of another dissertation, it is interesting to note that, beside being called ‘experimental’ and ‘avant-garde’, this form of cinematic expression has also been named ‘visionary cinema’ (Paul Adams Sitney), ‘undependent cinema’ (Emory Menefee), ‘underground/independent’ cinema (Jonas Mekas), not to mention the principles of ‘anti-film’ and ‘alternative’ film, elaborated by Yugoslavian theory and practice, in Zagreb and Belgrade.

What Jan-Christopher Horak wrote about the US tradition – that ‘in the earliest phases the American avant-garde movement cannot be separated from the history of amateur film’<sup>3</sup> – holds true also for the Yugoslavian experimental tradition. Namely, in the former Yugoslavia, experimental film almost consistently derived from the tradition of so-called amateur film, whose base consisted in the numerous cinema clubs (*kinoklub*) that developed in all major cities of the former federation, especially in the sixties and seventies.

According to the official system – socialist self-management of that time – self-organization was also present in the field of culture. Even more so, cinema clubs were part of the socialist project to bring technical culture and achievements closer to all citizens, and not only professionals; thus, the formation of amateur societies (amateur film, amateur photography, visual amateur groups and ‘colonies’, etc.) was systematically encouraged. In 1946, a special institution was established: Narodna Tehnika (Popular Engineering Society) with the aim of organizing, sponsoring and promoting different amateur activities. Even though they were under the ‘political’ control of the centre and were hierarchically organized, they were mostly left to their own devices as peripheral ‘amateur reservations’. The chance to pursue film was primarily taken by young people, often students and film buffs, who created in this way an important platform for experimenting and a reassessment of the conventional film language of Yugoslav cinema.

<sup>2</sup> This essay is an updated version of the text already published on the occasion of *As soon As I Open My Eyes I See a Film: Experiments in Yugoslav Art in the Sixties and Seventies*, exhibition curated by Ana Janevski, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, 2008 and *This Is All Film! Experimental Film in Former Yugoslavia 1951–1991*, exhibition curated by Bojana Piškur, Ana Janevski, Jurij Meden and Stevan Vuković, Museum of Modern Art Ljubljana, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Horak J-C (ed.), *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919–1945*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995, p.18. Quoted in Stevan Vuković, ‘Notes on Paradigms in Experimental Film in Socialist Yugoslavia’, *This Is All Film! Experimental Film in Yugoslavia 1951–1991*, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana, 2010.

Namely, after World War II, Yugoslav cinema was nationalized and in all the republics there was intensive work on the development of the infrastructure of the film industry.<sup>4</sup> During the fifties, war themes, the People's Liberation Struggle, the partisan fight against fascism and the revolution were the most frequently used sources of inspiration among filmmakers. The official politics privileged this form of cinematic expression, so at the same time the distance grew between professionalism and the so-called amateurism. Yet the marginalization of amateurism into the sphere of cinema clubs allowed for a greater freedom of action.

When speaking about the creation of new institutional forms in former Yugoslavia, touching upon broader political contexts is unavoidable. Actually, Tito's model of Yugoslavian socialism, implemented after the break with Stalin in 1948, tried to take advantage of the two dominant systems – it promoted both a non-alignment foreign policy and a new form of socialist economy in the self-management system. Its theoretical basis was provided by the 'Praxis' movement in the 'human anthropology' of early Marx, and by the summer school on the island of Korčula, where leading Marxist philosophers from all over the world gathered in the 1964–74 period.

At the same time, Tito's historical no to Stalin detached artistic practices from social realism and helped open the country to Western cultural influence by putting it in a position between 'East and West', introducing broader cultural freedom, assuming a modernist paradigm of abstract art as the official state art and showing Hollywood films in the cinemas. Moreover, the Yugoslav Film Archive or Yugoslav Cinematheque (Kinoteka) was formally established in 1949 in Belgrade with the aim of taking care of Yugoslavian films and film material and to further film culture and education. In 1951, it became part of the international network FIAF (the International Federation of Film Archives) and started with the screening of the first avant-garde from the twenties and thirties, Hollywood movies, French New Wave, Italian Neorealism.<sup>5</sup>

The participants in the film evenings in cinema clubs in the former Socialist Yugoslavia were frequent visitors of commercial cinemas, regular readers of film studies and possessed vast knowledge about cinema; one of the major impetuses came also from the modernist models of other arts: visual arts, literature and theatre. Yet, film as a

4 One of the best examples is Avala Film, founded in 1945 in Belgrade, the largest film company in the country. The studio made its first film in the post-war Yugoslavia of 1947 and went on to produce or co-produce over 400 documentaries, 200 Yugoslavian feature films and 120 international productions. Nevertheless, every republic hosted at least one film production company.

5 'A public programme including a tour of 89 Yugoslavian towns took place in 1952. It was then that the movie theatre was opened in Belgrade. The Museum of Yugoslavian Film Archive was a federal institution, but in 1952 it came under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Serbia, so that other republics subsequently opened similar movie theatres. The first was opened in Zagreb in 1957, and then in Sarajevo followed by Ljubljana in 1963.' Stevan Vuković, op. cit., p. 64.

medium was becoming more and more widespread; it was the only medium that allowed for an intertwining of visual arts, literature of (anti) narrative, music and film references: it allowed the choice of different subjects and the employment of various techniques.

Owing to constant demands for professionalization in all social systems, especially in the art world, from today's perspective it is almost impossible to correctly read the meaning of the terms 'amateur film' and 'amateurism' as related to film buffs active in the cinema clubs in the sixties and beginning of the seventies all over socialist Yugoslavia. Yet members of cine clubs were amateurs, most of them adhering to the meanings Maya Deren stressed in her 1959 essay 'Amateur Versus Professional', in particular her consideration of the Latin roots of the term 'amateur'. It designates one's practice as being 'for the love of the thing rather than for economic reasons and necessity.'<sup>6</sup> Or as Jonas Mekas pointed out when referring to the role of the independent filmmaker: 'You will make movies, you will record and celebrate life, but you will not make any money.'<sup>7</sup>

Regarding the former Yugoslavia, the term 'amateur' mainly designates production conditions, while 'experimental' indicates the procedures, aspiration and effects of a specific cinematic expression. Thus the separation between the two is unstable and unclear. This creative confusion in classification can be attributed in part to most of the filmmakers whose works can, in retrospect, be described as experimental. Either they soon exchanged amateur filmmaking for professional work in the cinema (e.g. Dušan Makavejev) or in the visual arts (e.g. Mladen Stilinović), or they went down in (or out of) history as film amateurs when the mid seventies saw the decline of cine clubs.<sup>8</sup>

The Serbian filmmaker Lazar Stojanović, writing about American underground film, associates it with freedom and rebellion, rather than with a cinematic genre, where underground equals amateurism, directness, imperfection and resistance. Moreover, a(n independent) film director is supposed to have above all a good knowledge of film and a strong personality. This praise of amateurism, in combination with a militant attitude of the director, can also be observed, albeit in a more apolitical version, in Mihovil Pansini and his GEF (the biennial Genre Experimental Film Festival).<sup>9</sup>

The main tendencies of GEF are: to fight against conventional film, and especially against conventional work in amateur film. To draw our amateur film from the narrow frameworks of the amateurish... we want to tear down

6 Maya Deren, 'Amateur Versus Professional', *Film Culture*, no. 39, Winter 1965, p. 46.

7 Jonas Mekas on underground film, Whitney Museum, New York, 1992.

8 See Bojana Piškur, Jurij Meden, 'A brief Introduction to Slovenian Experimental Film', *This Is All Film! Experimental Film in Former Yugoslavia 1951-1991*, op. cit.

9 Sezgin Boynik, 'Contributions to a Better Apprehension and Appreciation of Plastic Jesus by Lazar Stojanovic', *Život Umjetnosti*, no. 83, Zagreb, 2008.

the borders that exist between amateur and professional film. Film is one. ...Someone makes a film as an amateur but works as a professional. On the other hand, an amateur film can be sold subsequently. Therefore it is not possible to say what amateur, or what professional film is. If we cannot determine this, then there is no point in dividing films into amateur and professionalism.<sup>10</sup>

In 1962 and 1963, a group of film amateurs gathered in the Cinema Club Zagreb, founded in 1928, came up with the term *anti-film*. To be precise, two members of the cinema club, Mihovil Pansini and Tomislav Kobija, initiated lively discussions on the concept of *anti-film*, and these conversations were spontaneously named *Anti-film and Us*.<sup>11</sup> The main postulates of the anti-film movement were its negation of film as a conveyance, as an expression or communication between the artist and the viewers, considering it instead as an act of disclosure, of research exploration and reduction. *Anti-film* requested multiple reductions: the reduction of the author himself to his work, then the reduction of narration, of expressive means in film, of rational metaphor, traditional communication with the viewers, etc.

Immediately GEFF was established in Zagreb (the last one held in 1970), in parallel to the Music Biennial and the New Tendencies.<sup>12</sup> The festival attracted film enthusiasts, from all of the cinema clubs from the entire former Yugoslavia, contributing to the creation of formal and informal cinematic networks.<sup>13</sup> From as early as the first edition of the festival, named *Anti-film and New Tendencies in Cinema*, GEFF's inclination to connect all human activities was expressed, not only in the field of art, but in science and technology as well, overlapped with the broader world tendencies and interest in film as a subject of historical and theoretical research.

Thus the themes of the following festivals were: *Exploration of Cinema and Exploration through Cinema* (1965), *Cybernetics and Aesthetics* (1967), and *Sexuality as a New Road towards Humanity* (1970). However, what were the expressive novelties that *anti-film* and cinema-club experimental movies introduced, and who were the participants in GEFF? '...the festival of GEFF is a remarkable affair in which the entire Yugoslavian cinema comes together: feature makers, professional animators, dadaist film experiments, and rank

10 Mihovil Pansini, 'Prvi dan 19.12.1963', in Mihovil Pansini, Vladimir Petek, Zlatko Sudović, Kruno Hajdler, Milan Šamec (eds.): *Prva knjiga GEFFA 63/1*. Zagreb, 1967.

11 Along with Pansini and Kobija, Vladimir Petek, Zlatko Sudović, Kruno Hajdler, Milan Šamec, and a number of other authors also took part.

12 The first GEFF book, which documents in detail the so-called five discussions on anti-film, together with the booklet of the 67th edition and the newspapers accompanying the last one, are the only documents that testify to the festival activities. The graphic designer Mihajlo Arsovski designed all the material.

13 For an accurate list of the most prominent organizations and events related to experimental film in the former Yugoslavia, see *This Is All Film! Experimental Film in Former Yugoslavia 1951-1991*, op. cit.

amateurs from the 8mm club...' That's how Paul Adams Sitney describes GEFF during his visit to Zagreb.<sup>14</sup>

The festival was accompanied by thematic discussions with the participation of filmmakers, philosophers and artists, while the informative section included retrospectives of avant-garde films from the twenties, and the projections of foreign avant-garde films. In the first GEFF edition, a Belgrade based Yugoslav Cinematheque (Kinoteka) programme included a selection of the French, German, and American avant-garde features, and a set of movies by Norman McLaren. In 1967, the guest star was Paul Adams Sitney with a ten-hour programme of the American avant-garde and the Fluxus Anthology, while in the last GEFF one of the guests was Paul Morrissey with films from the Warhol Workshop and Carolee Schneemann with her sexual-diary movies. The projections of those films were an important and fascinating source for understanding the experimentation and the deconstruction of traditional structures of film and the established parameters in editing film materials, both in formal and content terms.

The main centres of avant-garde film expression were the cinema clubs in Zagreb, Belgrade and Split, and from the very beginning, these three cinema clubs announced different orientations, different authorial tendencies and technical solutions.

The structuralist inclinations of the Cinema Club Zagreb were marked by deliberation and experimentation with the medium, intertwined with visual arts. These multidisciplinary tendencies were already registered in the EXAT 51 group, while the poetics of Gorgona with the idea of the anti-group and the anti-magazine, and the holding of New Tendencies (biennial exhibition of kinetic and optical art from 1961 to 1973 with many international artists) were an important inspirational model for the development and emergence of the term 'anti-film' itself. It's important to mention that in Zagreb in the sixties we encounter authors who introduced the critical and new-media approaches into the dominant artistic production. They negated art trends, expressed critical views and employed ironic and subversive strategies seldom used before in the fields of visual and film art. Those artists, during the sixties, reached out and delved into an almost nihilistic atmosphere of anti-art: the foundation of the Gorgona anti-group and the publishing of the anti-magazine, the anti-painting of Julije Knifer, the no-art of Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos, and consequently the anti-film movement<sup>15</sup>, which finally resulted in the emergence of the so-called 'New

14 Paul Adams Sitney, 'Italy, Yugoslavia' (fragments), *Film Culture*, no. 46, Autumn 1967. Republished in *As soon As I Open My Eyes I See a Film: Experiments in Yugoslav Art in the Sixties and Seventies*, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, 2010.

15 'Anti' can be understood, according to the dominant disposition of the group, either as a negation of official artistic tendencies, or as an awareness that their artwork is barely acceptable or unacceptable as art. Likewise, 'anti' can be seen in the context of Gorgona's emphasis on the ideas of anti-art and anti-painting, as well as their affinity for the literature of absurd, anti-drama and anti-film.' Branka Stipančić, *Josip Vaništa, The Time of Gorgona and Postgorgona 1961-2010*. Zagreb, 2010. In a conversation with Mihovil Pansini, to the question: 'How did you decide on the term anti-film?', he answered: 'Everything was anti back then.' Mihovil Pansini was also one of Gorgona's 'adherents'.

Artistic Practice', which from the seventies onwards developed especially in the students' centres of former Yugoslavia.

The Zagreb filmmakers were interested in film for its properties and structure, and for the possibility of deliberation and experimentation via the medium itself. They promoted the values of experimentation and innovation with no narration, the introduction of accidental and existential issues, or they focused on the media itself. We find a range of direct interventions on the film itself: from scratching, painting and cutting, to a testing of tone-negative picture like in Vladimir Petek *Encounters*, (1963). The anti-narrative approach is emphasized by the use of the accidental as seen in the film *Scusa Signorina* (1963) by Mihovil Pansini, who was at the same time one of the chief ideologists of anti-film, which was filmed with the camera turned backwards, without supervision of what was being recorded, so the planned coincidence leads to the disappearance of the author.

Lukasz Ronduda commented on the use of the accidental in such films of the time: 'By making use of coincidence and a prior decision in their films, they sought to surpass previous humanistic methods of production of meaning and to allow for a different perspective, transcending human imagination and perception, rather than differing from them.'<sup>16</sup>

The visual artist Mladen Stilinović formed in 1969 the student film club Pan 69. Through the Union of Socialist Youth they received some funds to buy the necessary equipment and start making films. At first, Pan 69 had six or seven members and they were able to shoot film without any preliminary script writing or approval, as in the cine clubs. This self-organized space (of liberty) allowed for experimentation with a camera and film tape, mainly 8 and 16mm, as well as for public/club projections of films. The first produced film was screened at GEFF, and participated in numerous (amateur) film festivals.

Cinema Club Split was formed in 1952, and it 'launched' four generations of amateur authors. The films made in the Split club were mostly distinguished by a rigid visual and editing structure that precisely followed the rules of framing, had a pronounced absence of narration, and were characterized by the so-called 'filming in frame' of Ivan Martinac. At the same time, Martinac is one of the central individuals that 'seduced' generations of future authors gathered around the Cinema Club Split, and in a narrow alternative circle, there was talk about the Split Film School.

*The Faun's structure was programmatic. It was like Jonas Mekas' manifesto on the underground, like the Dada Manifesto... to make something that would be a flag.*<sup>17</sup>

Tomislav Gotovac's *The Forenoon of a Faun* (1963), which won multiple awards in the first GEFF, was a structuralist triptych about the idea of the fixed camera on a tripod. 'The voyeuristically observed movement of vaguely delineated figures on the sun terrace of a hospital is followed by a Wols-like gaze at the texture of a scratched wall and then, with all the erotic overtones of the rhythmic back-and-forth, a zoom onto a tree-lined intersection, with passersby and that consumer fetish of the era, the car.'<sup>18</sup> The term that would have allowed this film to be qualified as structural had not yet even entered into circulation in experimental world cinema.

From his beginnings in the Cinema Club Zagreb, through the making of the Belgrade Trilogy from 1964 *Straight Line (Stevens-Duke)*, *Blue Rider (Godard-Art)*, *Circle (Jutkevič-Count)*, to the inauguration of anti-narrative features of contemporary artistic discourse, acting outside of any artistic context, Gotovac also became a predecessor of the new art from the seventies. In 1967, Tomislav Gotovac realized the first happening in Yugoslavia *Happ Our Happening*, in Zagreb. He was also the country's first stalker, running naked through Belgrade in 1971. In his radical performances and provocative artistic expressions he tested the boundaries of public space within the socialist state. Many of his actions consisted of simple but charged activities, such as begging, cleaning city spaces, shaving and cutting people's hair in public, all of which confronted the urban environment and the socialist-petit-bourgeois moral system with his corporeal figure.

Nevertheless, film was the motto of Gotovac's life and artistic philosophy: an object of genuine fascination, an obsession the film experience formed a connection and a red line between works that do not disclose themselves in the medium of film, from collage to photography, and especially in his performances and actions. Asked what motivated him to watch a certain film more than once as a very young man, Gotovac replies: 'I knew even back then, that was my life. I did not make a distinction between life and film. I don't know if I can explain this. I am now watching, I am watching a movie...'<sup>19</sup>

Gotovac's whole activity is related to 'cinéphilie', it is embodied by the experience of the spectator, by the everyday feeling of the films as well as the filmic way of thinking of art. In the lack

<sup>16</sup> Lukasz Ronduda, 'Pragmatism of the Margins', *Experiments in Yugoslav Art in the Sixties and Seventies*, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> 'It's All a Movie', interview of Goran Trbuljak and Hrvoje Turković with Tomislav Gotovac, magazine *Film*, no. 10–11, Zagreb, pp. 39–66, 1977, reprinted in the catalogue: *Tomislav Gotovac: As Soon As I Open My Eyes I See a Film*, Croatian Film Clubs Association, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Georg Schöllhammer, 'Faun, Narcissus, Silenus. Tom', *One Needs to Live Self-Confidently... Watching*. Zagreb: What, How & for Whom, 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Tomislav Gotovac, op. cit.

of possibilities for making films Gotovac discovers a 'cinema with other means';<sup>20</sup> the deconstruction of its constitutive elements becomes an autonomous part of the artistic experiment. His cinematic way of thinking penetrates far into the private realm and explicitly incorporates private aspects into the films. At the same time, he is interested in the composition behind the narrative structure of Hollywood film, creating his own system of references and codes and using the structural means of experimental film to undertake his analysis.

Thus *The Forenoon of a Faun* juxtaposes ambivalent shots of human interaction with an almost abstract detail of a wall and cityscape. This accumulation of images, registering without intervention, reduction and repetitiveness, 'cataloguing' the fragments of reality and finding systems in unexpected, unforeseen circumstances, marks a personal standpoint that resists narration.

Talking about experimental film, Gilles Deleuze comments that one of its crucial tendencies is to recreate – then to inhabit – a concentrated shot of pure images. Deleuze therefore considers that its main point is in its tendencies. Indeed, rather than being a specific genre or type of film, experimental film is about taking a certain stance; it's an orientation that avoids film's most standardized function – of being a means for storytelling – focusing instead on its primary capacity to make things visible, creating building blocks of perception. The concrete results can then, of course, be poetic or political, expressive or just narrative. He also advocates that experimental film introduces formal tendencies and expressions, which are then accepted and absorbed by the mainstream discourse. As in Gotovac's case this point finds also ground in the films realised by the Belgrade filmmakers.

*For me cinema is an operation similar to guerrilla war, declared against all that which is determined, finite, dogmatic and eternal. Such a war should also be fought in cinema.*<sup>21</sup>

The most political stance in experimental film in the former Socialist Yugoslavia is definitely in the activity of the Belgrade cine club circle. From the Cinema Club Belgrade founded in 1951 and the Academic Club Belgrade founded in 1958, as opposed to the Split School and Zagreb anti-film tendencies, emerged films of symbolic and expressive cinematography. Under the influence of Russian Expressionism, the Polish Black Series and French New Wave, the first Belgrade films from the end of the fifties reflected human anxiety in search of the surreal and the absurd. Variations on the theme of innocence in flight from reality

is a frequent subject of Belgrade film lovers of the time, as seen in the films *The Wall* (1960) by Kokan Rakonjac, *Triptych of Matter and Death* (1960) by Živojin Pavlović, on the failure to escape and on existential anxiety, or in *Hands of Purple Distances* (1962) of Sava Trifković, about a girl's flight through a deserted and bizarre landscape.

The Cinema Club Belgrade mainly gathered a group of film *connoisseurs* organizing for the members practical and theoretical classes, it was necessary to pass exams to enter the club as well as to propose the script to the judgment of the rest of the members to get the necessary equipment for filming. The participation in the film projects of other members was also required.

The first antagonism in particular with the Zagreb circle already started during the first GEFF discussions, when Belgrade cinema makers like Makavejev, stressed their interest in researching reality and distancing themselves from pure experimentation. Moreover, they started to have their films produced by the national production companies, switched filming to 35mm, while the Zagreb based filmmakers still filmed in 16mm or even 8mm, without being remunerated: some of them, being unable to professionalize, turned to visual arts, like Mladen Stilinović, or like Gotovac who developed his very specific practice.

Hence we already see in the sixties the journey, as Stevan Vuković defines it, from the 'amateur paradigm' to the 'author paradigm'.<sup>22</sup> The Cinema Club Belgrad gave rise to the new major film paradigm of the sixties and seventies, what would later be denoted as the New Yugoslav Film. Namely, the cine club activity was a useful framework for the production of professional filmmakers, like Dušan Makavejev, Želimir Žilnik, Živojin Pavlović, Aleksandar Petrović, (and Karpo Ačimovic-Godina in Slovenia), as the disruptions that occurred in 'amateur' films flow into the mainstream or in this case, professional film.

Yet, for those directors the cine-club activity was a sort of *matériel d'apprentissage*. Želimir Žilnik, active in the Cinema Club Novi Sad, very quickly saw film as a tool of criticism, and he said this about the advantages of 'amateur' film: 'Very early I was forced to use all the methods of movement of amateur film. This environment of amateur film enabled me to rid myself of administrative labyrinths, which were the only way of acquiring money to make a film. It was a form of freedom'.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Dejan Sretenović, 'Cinema World of Slobodan Šijan', *Šijan, Around Film*. Belgrade: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Konrad Klejsa, 'Dušan Makavejev: The Paradoxes of a Subversive Imagination', *Piktogram*, no. 4, Warsaw, 2006.

<sup>22</sup> Stevan Vuković, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>23</sup> Marina Gržinić and Hito Steyerl, 'Firm Embrace of Socialism, an interview with Želimir Žilnik', *Zarez*, no. 134–135, Zagreb, 2007. Žilnik's film *Early Years* was made in 18 days and obtained the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival in 1969. However, many of the Black Wave films have been shown during foreign festivals, mainly at the Oberhausen film festival.

While the amateur films in Zagreb are characterized by experimentation with the medium, and while in Split a unique film expression is developing, Belgrade film amateurism makes a step forward and turns towards open criticism of the present and the alienation of the modern socialist man, pointing to class and social contradictions of socialism in contemporary Yugoslavia, breaking through the rarely disputed boundaries of state-socialist values.<sup>24</sup> They later pointed the finger at a specific phenomenon: the thriving of capitalism under the guise of a socialist revolution, and depicted the reality of precarious lives, mass unemployment, failed strikes, crises, etc.

As a consequence of an ideological campaign led by the cultural-political establishment, those films become known as the Black Wave. The article that introduced the term Black Wave was published in the newspaper *Borba* in 1969. A journalist stated that the Black Wave in Yugoslav films presents a 'systematic distortion of the present, in which everything is viewed through a monochromatic lens. Its themes are obscure and present improper visions and images of violence, moral degeneracy, misery, lasciviousness and triviality.' Thus started the process in the course of which Makavejev's, Žilnik's, Godina's films were prohibited from local screenings while Lazar Stojanović got a prison sentence for his film *Plastic Jesus* with Tomislav Gotovac in the main role.

## New Artistic Practice

The deliberate use of formal stylistic innovations in experimental film, that is to say the invention of hitherto disregarded connections, links, or interdisciplinary synapses between different forms of art, leads to analogous innovation in other fields of art, and even to an overlap in case of artistic standpoints of Gorgona, the Anti-film and New Tendencies. This parallel of somewhat implicit chronology of influences can be drawn in both the artworks, videos and films from the seventies, as well as with short movies of the then cinema clubs.

The artistic production of the seventies is characterized by the radicalization of visual codes and the emergence of new art forms – from video art to the use of the artist's body, from redefining the exhibition strategies to interventions in public space, and even to completely

<sup>24</sup> Among the first films that were locked away in a vault between 1958 and 1971, were Dušan Makavejev's *Don't Believe in Monuments* (1958) and *The Parade* (1962) while the amateur omnibus *The City* (1963), by Marko Babac, Kokan Rakonjac and Živojin Pavlović is one of the officially forbidden films in the history of Yugoslav cinema.

forsaking the boundary between life and art. In this radicalization and search for new forms of artistic expression, film and visual art meet. New Art Practice<sup>25</sup> is the umbrella term for the various critical and radical forms of the 'new art' that appeared in Yugoslavia after 1968. Such activities emerged and developed quite independently of each other, though they soon merged along a common artistic mentality, based mainly on the opposition to traditional and institutionalized forms of art and its presentation, founding its bases in the Student Cultural Centres both in Belgrade and in Zagreb.

The hybridization of visual art and film in the artistic practices of the seventies was not particularly present; artists were more inclined to use video particularly for documentation purposes. Still there are examples of films as work of art and not as mediator, interpreter or representer of some painterly, performative or other work, establishing according to Stevan Vuković in the conceptual paradigm.

In the film *NP 1977*, (1977), Serbian conceptual artist Neša Paripović, walks and runs through the city of Belgrade. His route is not structured by the urban grid of streets and sidewalks, but follows an imaginary trajectory. Miško Šuvaković in his analysis of Paripović's film, raises several problems: the mythology of the self-representing artist, the transformation of ordinary activity into exceptional acts, the reduction of film to the mechanical action of movement, the deconstruction of traditional narration, and the speculation conveyed by cinematic discourse, concerning questions of action and production.<sup>26</sup>

Zoran Popović introduced film as a medium in new art and realised short experimental films such as *Head/Circle* (1968) and he managed to capture a diversified flow of information related to artists, exhibitions and events, thus affirming the importance of documenting actions and works.

Mladen Stilinović made around 20 experimental films before starting his career as an artist. Already in his films from the early seventies, Stilinović deals with his future themes: the economy of production and the economy of language, with verbal irony and verbal cliché, with speech as a sensitive indicator of the social and political regime and occurring changes. Thus it is not surprising that one of the artist's first books – *Watchers Are Asked* (1974) – was created via taking photos of separate frames of a 16mm film and then linking them into a continuous whole and a recognizable accordion format. This book could be seen as a film using other means, as if a film had been deconstructed into its constitutive elements, becoming an independent work of art.

<sup>25</sup> The term New Art Practice was introduced by the Croatian art critic Marijan Susovski in the eponymous catalogue *The New Art Practice in Yugoslavia 1966-1978*. Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art Zagreb, 1978.

<sup>26</sup> Miško Šuvaković, Neša Paripovic, *Autoportreti*. Novi Sad: Prometej, 1996.

The phenomenon of cinema clubs and GEFf was at its peak in the first half of the sixties, but was never systematically explored nor valorised within the cultural-artistic framework of the time, outside the strict discourse of amateur and experimental film, and therefore, never institutionalized within a broader history.<sup>27</sup>

New interpretations and readings of amateur experimental film are not comprised only of interpretations of formal innovations negating media-specified coordinates, but they uncover new connections with the original intention and tendencies. The cinema clubs allowed for the opportunity of avant-garde experimentation, for self-organization in the spirit of socialist self-management, and for a certain forms of political engagement. They speak about art's own relationship to power, the possibilities and impotence, the distance from the structures of dominance and its collaboration with them.

The phenomenon of the Black Wave, which was in a way initiated in the cine clubs, seems to be the most radical and critical artistic expression, capable of revealing the mechanisms and side effects of Titoist socialism, of anticipating in a way the Yugoslav crises and of provoking political reaction. Why are they so interesting today, especially from the post-Yugoslav and post-socialist perspective?

One of the intentions of the research is also to oppose the simplified and ideological representations of the (Yugoslav) socialist past. The most popular version seems to be based on a dichotomy of the brave dissident artist struggling for the freedom of expression in a totalitarian regime. This vision takes the countries of the former Eastern Bloc for a homogenous entity and ignores the singularity of the Yugoslav socialist Project. At the same time it is not about any kind of Yugo-nostalgia, but about a critical research and reading of the common heritage of the socialist project and the positioning of art practices within the given socio-political constellation. Thus the goal is not to give an encompassing historical overview, but rather, researching concrete artistic practices that can propose a new perspective of acting in a contemporary situation and to understand the significance of this heritage today.

By analyzing cinema clubs as extra-systemic spaces, that is, as systems of culture autonomous from the official one, we demonstrated how the institutional framework has, therefore, shown itself as prone to reconfiguration, reinvention and adjustment, thus making possible the paradigmatic twists in filmic and artistic production.

When we read the documents on GEFf, it becomes clear that there were a number of controversies voiced in the conversations and the different perspectives of cinema amateurs

<sup>27</sup> We should certainly point out Hrvoje Turković's systematic explorations of the framework of Croatian experimental film, which represented an important and valuable source.

(later professionals) from former Yugoslavia, but almost all of them were in agreement on the importance of collectivity (reaching) beyond programme association, on the need to create a radically different cinema and that every work of art can be a catalyst of positive social changes. 'Amateurs are costless film lovers. This costless love gives them freedom and directs them toward the avant-garde and non-conformity. They can ask forbidden questions and give illicit answers.'<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Mihovil Pansini, 'Recapitulation of the Fourth Conversation', op cit.

Quaderns portàtils  
ISSN: 1886-5259

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Proofreading by Daniel Campi  
Design by Cosmic <[www.cosmic.es](http://www.cosmic.es)>  
Typography: Clarendon and Trade Gothic



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In 2010 Ana Janevski curated the film programme *We can't promise to do more than an experiment; Experimental film and beyond in Yugoslavia in sixties and seventies* at MACBA. This essay is an updated version of the text already published on the occasion of *As soon As I Open My Eyes I See a Film: Experiments in Yugoslav Art in the Sixties and Seventies* and *This Is All Film! Experimental Film in Former Yugoslavia 1951-1991*.

**Quaderns portàtils** (Portable Notebooks) is a line of publications available free of charge through the internet. In general, the texts proceed from lectures and seminars that have taken place at MACBA, as well as from exhibition catalogues. This and other issues of the *Quaderns portàtils* collection are available on the Museum website.

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