

**Petra Belc**

Center for Women's Studies, Zagreb

## **Yugoslav Experimental Cinema between Film and Art – Regional Heritage, Feminist Critique and the Question of Methodology**

The central issue of my research is Yugoslav experimental cinema, avant-garde film practice rooted in the culture of regional cine-clubs whose specific nature spreads across several disciplines and poses challenging questions. By now the names of Tomislav Gotovac, Sanja Iveković, Mihovil Pansini, Radoslav Vladić, Neša Paripović, Vladimir Petek, Ivan Martinac, Dušan Makavejev and the likes are well known, but the familiarity with their work is conditioned by the field of the researcher and the interest of the public. Namely, up to now Yugoslav experimental cinema in its entirety was mainly the subject of exhibitions and curatorial work<sup>1</sup> but there has not been a single filmological study which unified this practice and attempted to make a clear delineation between the films of the artists and the films of the filmmakers,<sup>2</sup> or tried to explore women's experimental cinema during this period. There were more than just a few women creating during the cine-club era and some of them achieved international success, like the Zagreb experimental film director Tatjana Ivančić, the first woman to acquire the title of The Master of Amateur Film in Yugoslavia and a prolific author with supposedly over 60 short films<sup>3</sup> and awards from Japan. Besides Ivančić, between 1960's and 1980's there were also Belgrade directors like Bojana Vujanović who studied in Łódź,<sup>4</sup> Divna Jovanović who made exquisite hand-painted experimental films, Biljana Belić who

---

<sup>1</sup> There were several exhibitions in the past seven years dealing with the subject of Yugoslav experimental cinema (like "As soon as I open my eyes I see a film. Experiment in the art of Yugoslavia in the 60's and 70's" in the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (25.04 – 22.06.2008) curated by Ana Janevski, "This Is All Film! Experimental Film in Yugoslavia 1951-1991" in the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana (22. 10. 2010 - 28. 2. 2011) curated by Bojana Piškur, Ana Janevski, Jurij Meden and Stevan Vuković) as well as international screenings of the films from this period shown under the aegis of (Ex-) Yugoslavia (like "Uncharted Serbia: The Avant-Garde of the Kino Clubs/Experimental Ex-Yu" at the Thessaloniki International Film Festival in 2009., Screening of experimental film and video practices in former Yugoslavia (1965 – 1990) at the Residency Unlimited in 2009. curated by Branka Benčić, "Yugoslav Experimental Cinema" at the Anthology Film Archives in 2012. following the publishing of the book *Cinema by other means* by Pavle Levi...).

<sup>2</sup> When discussing moving images, Piotr Piotrowski for instance mentions Paripović and Iveković but not Pansini or Makavejev, whereas the exhibitions or screenings focusing on Yugoslav experimental **cinema** tend to include films of both authorial streams (filmmakers and conceptual artists).

<sup>3</sup> According to the Zagreb Cinematheque only ten of her films are digitized.

<sup>4</sup> Important historical center of Polish experimental cinema with its group of experimental filmmakers *Workshop of Film Form*.

made lyrical diaristic films, or Zorica Kijevčanin whose film *Golo (Naked)* "with its radicalism surpasses all Yugoslav alternative films on the subject" (Jovan Jovanović). However, not coming from the art world these women are rarely mentioned in the context of Yugoslav experimental cinema and their films (except Vujanović) are almost never included in the retrospective screenings.

Besides the question of the "black box versus white cube" and the following feminist critique, Yugoslav experimental cinema nested itself in the midst of complex socio-political and economical factors. Under the aegis of *Technics to the people!* and governed by the socialist selfmanagement cine-clubs were a space of freedom of expression. As such they exerted strong influence on the New Yugoslav Film and especially the controversial Serbian Black Wave, whose most prominent directors started off as cine-clubs members and "amateur" filmmakers. Therefore, in order to fully grasp and understand this experimental film/art practice one needs to engage in an interdisciplinary research of a broad scope: the history of art as well as film in Yugoslavia, the position of women in the socialist regime as well as in **history**, and the cultural-historical and political analysis (e.g. Cold War studies) of the context in which these films were made. Bearing all this in mind my doctoral dissertation would be structured as follows: By researching the formal aspects of the films between 1953 and 1990 I shall attempt a historical overview along with a typological systematization of the films in order to try to explicate the canon of experimental filmmaking in Yugoslavia. This part of the research will be accompanied by a feminist critique through an inclusion of female directors of experimental films, and followed by a questioning of their exclusion from present theoretical and historical narratives on this subject. In the second part of my research I will focus on sociopolitical contextualization of this artistic practice in the Yugoslav era, which I believe is important for two – in terms of cause-and-effect – mutually intertwined reasons. First is a deeper understanding of the development of historical and contemporary (experimental) cinema in the Balkan region through exploring the artistic and political differences between the republics. This will help me to structure and typologically define the broader canon. The second reason is aimed at understanding the historical and political circumstances in the region through meticulous analyses of alternative films.

Finally, the question which alone as Ana Janevski pointed out could be the subject of a single dissertation is – what is experimental film after all?

All these factors pose the question of the adequate methodology (methodologies) employed in such a research, which due to the unsolved regional problems of mainly nationalist and

economic nature, make the systematic overview of Yugoslav experimental cinema a challenging and exciting task.