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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 “prison-house 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 Klopčič, 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.”⁵⁴ 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.”⁵⁵

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).

Sex and the Socialist Revolution

Makavejev must be seen as both an international artist and an intensely Yugoslavian one.

Phillip Lopate

Already in his first feature, *Man Is Not a Bird* (1965), Dušan Makavejev established montage as the crucial element of his cinematic technique. Two years later, with *Love Affair, or the Tragedy of a Switchboard Operator* (1967), he radicalized his editing-oriented approach by introducing the compilation film as the cinematic form of his choice. With *Innocence Unprotected*, his third film, the director fully asserted himself as a foremost contemporary master of the film collage.

Originally, *Innocence Unprotected* was the title of the first Serbian “talkie,” produced and directed in 1943, during the Second World War, by the real-life Belgrade strongman and acrobat Dragoljub Aleksić. In this heavy-handed, almost campy, melodrama of “primitive vitality” (as Makavejev himself put it), Aleksić also plays the main character, himself. An orphaned girl, Nada, is blindly in love with Aleksić. He, too, loves her, but Nada’s evil stepmother has somebody else in mind for her: the rich and evil Mr. Petrović. Aleksić eventually saves Nada from Petrović’s brutal advancements, and this happy resolution confirms what the film has been intent on depicting all along: Aleksić’s heroism, bravery, and superhuman strength (fig. 1.2).

Formally, Aleksić’s film represents a mixture of the fictional melodrama and the documentary footage of the acrobat performing his amazing stunts, such as climbing the “pillar of death” and (the illusion of) holding only with his teeth onto a rope suspended from a flying plane. Makavejev appropriates Aleksić’s film, hand-tints parts of it, and gives it a more elaborate sound track, but, most important, he “expands” it by making it part of a larger cinematic collage. In this expanded edition of the film, he intercuts

- the original film *Innocence Unprotected*;
- archival materials from the same period, including shots of German destruction of Belgrade in April 1941, and footage from the

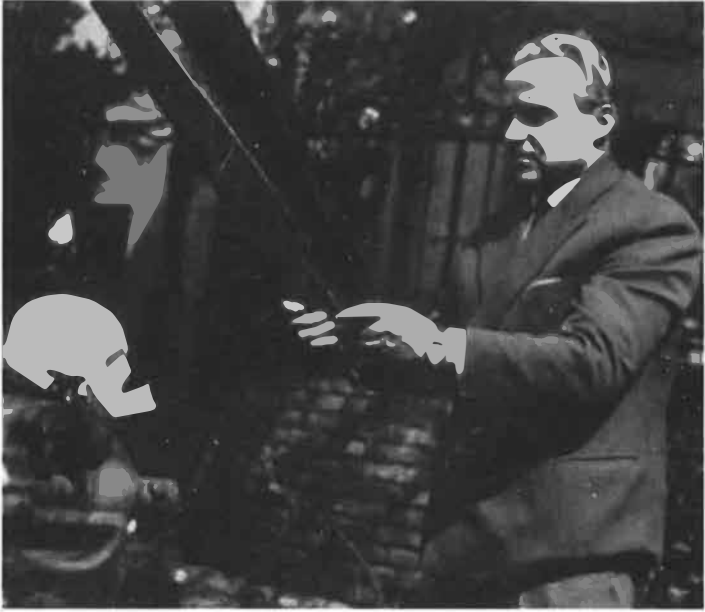


FIGURE 1.2 *Innocence Unprotected* (Dušan Makavejev, 1968)

“Nova Srbija” (New Serbia) propaganda films depicting Serb quisling leaders Milan Nedić and Dimitrije Ljotić;

- new color footage, directed by Makavejev himself, consisting of interviews with the now aged Aleksić and members of his cast and crew, and a series of tableaux in which the still well-built strongman poses for the camera.

By contextually “opening up” the original story, Makavejev introduces a dose of ambiguity into the simplistic, straightforward melodramatic narrative of *Innocence Unprotected*. He invites the viewer to reinterpret this piece of cinematic fiction by sorting out and assigning meaning to the numerous montage links and juxtapositions established between the different film texts. “Through the multiple perspective he [Makavejev] creates,” suggests Roy Armes, “he is able to use the original *Innocence Unprotected* to probe both the ironies of history and the paradoxes of

film. Which is the real 1942—the film’s heroics or the newsreel horror? What do we mean by innocence? Which is truer, Aleksić’s vision of virtue triumphant or the Nazi propaganda film’s declaration of Serbo-German friendship?”¹⁰

On the one hand, Makavejev’s explication of the grim realities of the historical context within which Aleksić’s film was produced (German occupation and bombing of Belgrade; indigenous fascist forces in Serbia) seems to further enlarge, as Goulding puts it, “upon the ‘innocence’ of *Innocence Unprotected*—with its naiveté, air of honest enthusiasm, resourcefulness, seeming obliviousness to the harshness and deprivations of the time, and the uncomplicated, cartoon-like moral universe of good and evil which it portrays.”¹¹ In this light Aleksić’s death-defying stunts are to be seen not only as acts of bravery but also as acts of resistance to the oppressive, constraining, and ultimately murderous society. Continuing in the footsteps of various hypnotists, circus performers, and other entertainers from Makavejev’s earlier films, the acrobat functions like an Eisensteinian generator of “attractions,” which excite viewers and trigger in them a strong sense of visceral and emotional negation of the broader social environment within which they are situated. If one adds to this the fact that it is Aleksić and his “free as a bird” lifestyle that Nada also longs for (opposing her stepmother’s wishes and Petrović’s advancements), then the release from the societal constraints, a theme heavily promoted in the film, cannot but be seen as having a sexually liberatory function as well.

On the other hand, by unveiling in his original color footage both the strongman’s enormous pleasure in posing for the camera and his inclination toward self-glorification, Makavejev is calling attention to the extent to which one of the primary functions of the original *Innocence Unprotected* was to strengthen the myth about this “Balkan superman.” In doing so, Aleksić’s self-promotional film was in one sense blatantly neglecting all the complexities, difficulties, and painfulness of life in Belgrade under the German occupation. Instead, what it offers is a collection of simplified and purified images about the strongman’s victories. With his new version of *Innocence Unprotected* Makavejev “pierced,” as Petar Ljubojev put it, “the historiographic hole” existing in the original film, thus explicating the escapist and reductivist character of the

cinematic myth/illusion about the superhero who flies above the city, watching over and protecting its inhabitants.¹²

What is particularly significant about this demythologizing “interpretational option,” offered in Makavejev’s expanded version of *Innocence Unprotected*, is that it is laced with allusions to the official socialist mythology and iconography of the Titoist Yugoslavia. One of the final interview scenes with Aleksić takes place, for instance, in front of a large photographic portrait of Josip Broz Tito. Cinematic tableaux in which the strongman (who, much like Tito, began his career as a metal worker) poses for Makavejev’s camera sometimes recall the not-too-different images of the Yugoslav president, notorious for his own pleasure in being photographed.¹³ And, as Goulding piercingly observes, on a more metaphorical level, Aleksić’s death-defying stunts and acrobatic heroism suggest “the legendary stories of Tito’s narrow escapes as an illegal party organizer, his leadership of the Partisans during the war, in which he repeatedly led his forces through the encircling rings of vastly superior enemy forces, and the diplomatic tight-wire act he performed after the war in charting Yugoslavia’s independent course between East and West.”¹⁴ With the “Hymn to Aleksić,” composed in the spirit of Yugoslav Partisan songs and repeatedly played throughout the film, the sense of the acrobat’s bravura being mythologized in a manner reminiscent of the methods used by the Yugoslav socialist cultural establishment is given its final touch. As such, the film seems to ask, how can these acts still be experienced as liberating? How can they still symbolize unbound human freedom?

Questions of this type are explored even more thoroughly in Makavejev’s next film, *WR: Mysteries of the Organism*, with the emphasis now explicitly placed on the antithetical relationship between sexual freedom and political oppression. The filmmaker offers as his starting point a documentary segment on the life and work of Wilhelm Reich (thus the film’s title: *WR*), the controversial German psychoanalyst who sought to reconcile Freudian and Marxist ideas and was expelled both from the Communist Party of Germany in 1933 and from the International Psychoanalytical Association in 1934. Reich posited patriarchal sexual repression (repression that is social in origin) as the foundation of political authoritarianism and economic exploitation in the class society.

In an essay entitled “The Materialist Discoveries of Psychoanalysis and Some Idealist Deviations” he claimed that

the definition of the reality principle as a social demand remains formalistic unless it makes full allowance for the fact that the reality principle as it exists today is only the principle of *our* society. . . . To be concrete, the reality principle of the capitalist era imposes upon the proletariat a maximum limitation of his needs while appealing to religious values, such as modesty and humility. It also imposes a monogamous form of sexuality, etc. All this is founded on economic conditions; the ruling class has a reality principle which serves the perpetuation of its power.¹⁵

After raising the question—“But in what way does social ideology affect the individual?”—Reich further argued:

The Marxian doctrine of society was obliged to leave this question open as being outside its proper sphere; psychoanalysis can answer it. For the child, the family—which is saturated with the ideologies of society, and which, indeed, is the ideological nucleus of society—is temporarily, even before he becomes engaged in the production process, the representative of society as a whole. The Oedipus relationship not only comprises instinctual attitudes: the manner in which a child experiences and overcomes his Oedipus complex is indirectly conditioned both by the general social ideology and by the parents’ position in the production process; furthermore, the Oedipus complex itself, like everything else, depends ultimately on the economic structure of society. More, the fact itself that an Oedipus complex occurs at all must be ascribed to the socially determined structure of the family.¹⁶

In Makavejev’s film, documentary material about Reich—whose synthetic theories provide the basis for the director’s own approach to the relationship between sex and politics—includes photographs and home-movie snippets of the psychoanalyst and his family; original footage shot in the United States (where Reich fled from the advancing Nazism), at the *Reich Museum* in Rangeley, Maine, and outside the Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary, Pennsylvania, where he was imprisoned by the McCarthyites and where he died in 1957; “direct cinema”-type interviews (conducted by Makavejev) with Reich’s son Peter, daughter Eva Reich-Moise, and a number of contemporary Reichian psychotherapists—Myron Sharaf

(who introduces Reich’s unusual device, the “orgon accumulator”), Alexander Lowen (who discusses the “character-armour” theory, and the Bio-Energetic therapy), and Robert Ollendorff (who claims that total sanity, if achieved, would result in suicide). But the director extends his montage method toward creating a multileveled audio-visual collage, and besides this documentary material on Reich he also incorporates into the film:

- a fictional story, set in the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, depicting Milena—a young Reichian revolutionary who promotes ideas about the liberating power of orgasm—trying to educate Vladimir Ilyich, the visiting Russian champion skater (named, conveniently, after Lenin), about the advantages of a humanist, revisionist Marxist approach over the hard-line Stalinist dogma (fig. 1.3);
- footage of the late 1960s U.S. counterculture, depicting various radical political, artistic, and sexual practices, such as antiwar activities of the beatnik and hippie movements (represented by Tuli



FIGURE 1.3 *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* (Dušan Makavejev, 1971)

Kupferberg of the rock band The Fugs, whose ironic protest songs include lyrics such as “kill for peace” and “who will police our judges?”); sex-art (“masturbatory paintings” by Betty Dodson, on display at the *United States of Erotica* gallery, and sculpted penises by Nancy Godfrey); drag and transsexuality (Jackie Curtis, Andy Warhol’s “Superstar” from *Women in Revolt* and *Flesh*);

- excerpts from Mikhail Chiaureli’s film *The Vow*, a Soviet socialist-realist ode to Stalin;
- shots from a Nazi propaganda film about mental institutions and the “benefits” of euthanasia;
- images of political rallies in Mao Tse Tung’s China;
- a variety of music and sound tracks: from Soviet communist hymns to Coppertone and Coca-Cola radio ads; from Yugoslav folk songs to “Lili Marlene”; from Bedrich Smetana’s “Moldau” to American rock poems of the 1960s.¹⁷

In *WR* American capitalist society and the Soviet model of state socialism are both treated as “monuments to sexuality misdirected into power politics and militarism.”¹⁸ McCarthyism, the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Leninism, Stalinism, and their legacy are all seen as symptoms of the political neuroses caused by unresolved sexual issues. Achievements of the more liberated American counterculture are not simply taken for granted either but are approached with a dose of equivocation. They are sympathetically endorsed yet at the same time questioned about the limits of their political subversiveness and their ability to fully escape the grip of consumerism and commodity fetishism. Thus, for instance, as Jackie Curtis strolls down a busy street, passionately licking an ice-cream cone, one wonders if the sound track accompanying his/her stroll—consisting of radio ads for Coppertone and Maybelline—is here intended to reinforce the camp effect s/he is generating or, rather, to comment ironically on the ability of the American mass-culture industry to “tame” the countercultural “excesses” of this sort by assimilating them into itself. Similarly, when Tuli Kupferberg patrols midtown Manhattan, dressed in a combat uniform and sporting a machine gun, the transgressive political content of this performative burlesque seems, in fact, some-

what undermined by the not-too-“encouraging” reactions elicited from the passers-by: ignorance, sneer (from some corporate types), or surprise on the face of an elderly lady.

The icons and symbols of Yugoslav state socialism also come under *WR*'s Reichian cine-critique, for these, too, are icons and symbols of an institutionalized ideology not unfamiliar with oppressive and dogmatic methods. Thus, the Yugoslav People's Army is exemplified in the character of Ljuba, a soldier who claims that he “mounts guard by day and girls by night” and who attributes equal importance to his sexual coupling with Milena's roommate, Jagoda, and the Yugoslav War of Liberation. In a similar fashion Milena, commenting on the Yugoslav idea of “socialist self-management,” instructs the working class that “between socialism and physical love there can be no conflict. Socialism must not exclude human sensual pleasures from its program!” She also adds, in a manner inclusive of some self-criticism: “No excitement can ever equal the elemental force of orgasm. That's why politics attract those of us whose orgasm is substandard, defective, disturbed, or premature!” Finally, in an infinitely humorous and, from the perspective of the Titoist socialist regime, an overtly blasphemous scene, a Partisan snake dance is organized by the Yugoslav workers singing, “Life without fucking isn't worth a thing!”

Makavejev, suggests Goulding, “assumes an ironic and satirical attitude toward all forms of dogmatism and cant—including an affectionately satirical handling of Milena's naive, simplistic, and rhetorical presentation of Reichian sexual politics.”¹⁹ Despite all her sexual-political enlightenment and radicalism, Milena also demonstrates a weakness for the “old-fashioned,” traditional romanticism: the moment she first sees Vladimir Ilyich, she is awed by his grandiose appearance. At the same time, however—and all the satirical criticism leveled against the Yugoslav state ideology notwithstanding—Reichian ideas about sexual liberation are voiced in the film from *within* Yugoslavia and by a *Yugoslav* revolutionary (Milena). In the context of Makavejev's explication of a widespread sexual and political oppression, the integrity and originality of the country's “autonomous path to socialism” are thus still preserved. As Vladimir Ilyich puts it, relating his impressions of Yugoslav socialism to Milena: “Well, I've been to the East and I've been to the West, but it

was never like this. Wonderful!” What is more, in a moment of weakness, seduced by Milena’s charms and her enthusiasm for Permanent Revolution *cum* Permanent Orgasm, Vladimir even admits to the existence of a tender, loving side of his own personality, which he, nonetheless, keeps suppressed by means of the (body) politics of the firm hand. The words Makavejev puts into his character’s mouth at this point represent, in fact, Lenin’s own admission that music may weaken one’s political resolve:

Nothing is lovelier than the “Apassionata.” I could listen to it every day! Marvelous, superhuman music! With perhaps naïve pride, I think: what wonders men can create. But I can’t listen to music. . . . It gets on my nerves. It arouses a yearning in me to babble about nothing . . . to caress people who, living in a hell, can still create such beauty. But nowadays if you stroke anybody’s head, they’ll bite off your hand! Now, you have to hit them on the head, hit them on the head mercilessly . . . though in principle we oppose all violence!

After delivering the speech, Vladimir slaps Milena, at which point Makavejev cuts to a shot of Stalin. Intended as Milena’s point of view, the shot visually conveys her recognition of Vladimir’s incurable rigidity and authoritarianism. And indeed, in the end, afraid to confront the amorous feelings he has developed for Milena, Vladimir cuts her head off (off-screen) with one of his ice-skates. He has remained, as Milena’s decapitated head (placed on an autopsy table) proclaims, “a genuine Red Fascist.” Yet this is no reason, as the cut-off head further suggests, for Milena (and Makavejev) to become “ashamed of my communist past.” For what she stands for in the film is the abundant revolutionary and sexual energy, the emancipatory force that “got stuck” underneath the reified political armor of the socialist state (“The October revolution was ruined when it rejected Free Love!”), but the release of which is not yet a lost cause—at least it would seem so in Yugoslavia at the time.

This dynamic interplay of “freezing” and “releasing” the energetic (revolutionary, sexual) potential is certainly among the most important structuring principles underlying the film as a whole. Taking place under the sign of Reich’s quantitative theories of “sex-economy” and “orgasmic potency,” it is emblematic of Makavejev’s commitment to a libidinal-materialist (as opposed to semiotically inclined) cine-aesthetic and his investment in filmmaking as a process of “charting the cathexes,

decathexes, and countercathexes of the libidinal economy.”²⁰ The interplay of “arousal” and its “interruption” (as Makavejev himself describes it) motivates a number of interesting visual juxtapositions in the film, such as the one contrasting Chinese revolutionary masses (literally, movement and arousal of enormous proportions) with Stalin assuming a stiff dominating posture in front of his obedient subjects. Another, much more “sexually explicit,” expression of this technique is found in the famous, elaborate montage sequence at the core of which is the comparison of Stalin’s authoritarian figure with a red sculpted penis (figs. 1.4, 1.5, 1.6). This collage-sequence incorporates images of sculptress Nancy Godfrey producing a plaster-cast of Jim Buckley’s (editor of *Screw* magazine) erect penis (phallic fetishism); Stalin (from the fiction film *The Vow*) proclaiming that “the first stage of communism has been successfully completed”; patients in a mental asylum (excerpt from a Nazi propaganda film, used here to suggest confinement and submission to authority); Tuli Kupferberg simulating masturbation on a rifle (sexuality sublimated into militarism and political violence). Engaging, in addition, a sound track just as heteroglossic as its image counterpart (The Fugs’ song “Kill for Peace,” Smetana’s “Moldau,” a hymn to the Communist Party, and a cheerful Yugoslav folk song),



FIGURE 1.4 *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* (Dušan Makavejev, 1971)



FIGURE 1.5 *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* (Dušan Makavejev, 1971)



FIGURE 1.6 *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* (Dušan Makavejev, 1971)

this complex audio-visual mosaic invites the viewer to contemplate the idea that the Revolution, not unlike an aroused male member, was full of potential but that—again, not unlike the latter, when bound by a plaster cast—it was arrested in its development, brought to a premature halt, by the authoritarianism, ideological rigidity, and oppressiveness of its leaders, these powerful yet symbolic (frozen, *not* real, as the director likes to point out) phalluses!²¹

Similarities between Makavejev's "cine-Reichianism" and Herbert Marcuse's contemporary model of "psycho-Marxist" theory are here difficult to overlook. In his *Eros and Civilization* (1955), a work popular among the 1960s intellectuals in Yugoslavia (as in the West), Marcuse developed the notion of "surplus repression," which he distinguished from "primary" repression, posited by Freud as constitutive of civilization (as separating the human from the animal world, the "pre-history" of human subjectivity from its history). Modeled after Karl Marx's concept of *surplus value*, "surplus repression" describes the historically specific and (broadly speaking) ideologically motivated forms of *secondary* social repression: those types of libidinal control that ground inequality and exploitation in the class society. In light of this theory the project of Reichian "sexual liberation" can rather naturally be commended as a pioneering effort aimed precisely at criticizing and subverting the *excesses of subjugation*, which various political, economic, and cultural norms of conduct readily yield.²²

But Marcuse also recognized (already in *Eros and Civilization* and especially in his 1964 work, *One-Dimensional Man*) that "surplus repression" is a phenomenon too complex to be successfully countered merely by adopting a liberal-humanist attitude of social permissiveness and espousing a multitude of nonnormative, "alternative" types of cultural practice. This view particularly strongly informs Makavejev's already-mentioned "ambivalent endorsement" of American countercultural activities depicted in *WR*: praiseworthy as they are in their own right, sexual freedoms characterizing the socioeconomically advanced West cannot be simply equated with an actual *elimination* of surplus repression. In fact, according to Marcuse—and Makavejev—the (seemingly) nonrepressive cultural logic of individualist liberalism can, at its worst, even help *perpetuate* the existing reality of socioeconomic inequality, by

“numbing” one’s interests in a community-oriented politics of radical change and by reducing one’s desire to strive for—to attribute a politically transformative power to—that which lies beyond the limits of the permissible and the accessible.²³

Montage: *Praxis*

Whether his films deal with Wilhelm Reich and his theories of sexual liberation or with Aleksić, the “Balkan superman,” and his stunts performed in the sky above Belgrade, one of the central and persistently explored themes of Dušan Makavejev’s cinema is the essential incompatibility between the notion of human freedom and the various institutionalized and reified forms of social and political life. In this respect Makavejev’s views come exceptionally close to some of the major ideas of the *Praxis* school of Marxist revisionism. As Herbert Eagle explains, “Makavejev’s films probe the principal dichotomy between liberated individual consciousness and various forms of alienation and repression (ideological dogmatism, determinism, institutionalized rigidity and elitism), thus reflecting very accurately the major concerns of the Yugoslav Marxist humanist thinkers, who have declared themselves against all forms of authoritarianism and domination and have criticized those institutions of power, authority, and socialization that are by their very nature alienating.”²⁴

Summarizing the basic position of the *Praxis* group, who developed their ideas under the influence of Karl Marx’s early manuscripts, Mihailo Marković writes: “[M]an is essentially a being of *praxis*, i.e., a being capable of free creative activity by which he transforms the world, realizes his specific potential faculties and satisfies the needs of other human individuals.”²⁵ In the same vein Gajo Petrović, another member of the school, claims that

revolution as we see it is possible only as an activity through which man simultaneously changes the society in which he lives and himself. . . . The vulgar Marxist idea that we should first create the new social structure (which would easily produce a new man) is as much a failure as the Christian belief that we should first achieve a change in man’s heart (because the changed man will easily organize a better society).²⁶

According to the *Praxis* thinkers, individual freedom is a necessary precondition for collective, societal freedom. In his study “Order and Freedom” Ljubomir Tadić, for example, suggests that “freedom is possible only when man is truly the subject, the *creator*, of his own fate, and not a mere *object* over which power is exercised.”²⁷ Of course, such a position—and its cinematic correlate, found in the New Film authors’ call for total freedom of expression and individual, over collective, forms of engagement—inevitably opens up the related question of how, and whether at all, it is possible to avoid considering Marxist revolutionary ideals in static terms, as a set of concrete, predetermined properties, the practical realization of which is being sought or may even be claimed to have been achieved already. Or, as Gajo Petrović summarily put it, “When, if at all, should creativity of a socialist revolution stop?” His answer to this question is, “Obviously, when every self-alienation is abolished, when man becomes fully man, and society completely human. However, when should such a moment actually arise? Hopefully never. . . . If man is to be, developing to the full extent his potentialities, then the socialist revolution is thinkable only as a never-ending process. Only in living as a revolutionary can man fulfill his essence.”²⁸

Contemplating the relationship between art and revolution from a similarly libertarian perspective, director Živojin Pavlović posits the latter as an “essentially anarchistic event,” the true purpose of which is “[n]ot the change in the name of something, but the change for change’s sake, as the meaning of lasting existence.” “That is why,” he further claims, assessing the socially critical dimension of his cinematic practice, “I do not think I would be able to say in the name of what I am engaged, but I do know that I must be engaged.”²⁹ Where Makavejev’s own understanding of this issue is concerned, he prefers to emphasize that rather than simply advocating an anarchist position, he believes in “a kind of well organized anarchy!”³⁰ Linking this idea with his cinematic form, he asserts that in *WR* the central objective was to

build a movie that is a kind of interplay between organization and spontaneity. For it seems to me that the all-anarchism [sic] of, let’s say, the New American Cinema or the anarchism of the New Left . . . is inefficient because it lacks organization; yet if it turns to organization it takes the same old forms, like the

highly organized . . . groups, so this just perpetuates the old system of power and fighting power with power. And it seems to me that we have to fight power with spontaneity and humor, but in a more organized way.”³¹

For Makavejev, then, acquisition of individual freedom against the background of societal norms and dominating ideological frameworks simply does not suffice. What seems even more important is that the society and its power structures themselves enter the process of permanent transformation and improvement by seeking to accommodate themselves to the needs and desires of the individual. As James Roy MacBean asserts in his excellent reading of *WR*, “precisely because Makavejev’s method is so profoundly dialectical, we sense that the contradiction between the individual and the social aspirations need not precisely be an antagonistic one: the plea . . . is a plea for the individual, but for the individual who himself subscribes to the communist commitment to create a society which provides to each according to his need.”³²

One major implication of the thus conceived dialectical operation between the individual and the society is that no “proper” form of social **organization can be determined *in advance*** because no **such thing as collective sociopolitical ideals can be said to exist in themselves, external to the realm of human practice**. And it is only with this point in mind that one can fully understand Makavejev’s use of montage as a device by which to accomplish a cinematic critique of ideology (state-socialist but also capitalist). He conceives of the viewer of his films *as precisely that individual whose complete freedom he is advocating*. Thus, for example, in relation to *Innocence Unprotected* spectators can position themselves in a number of ways:

As they watch the film, viewers will spontaneously make choices according to their own predispositions. Some will believe that they are following a melodrama filled with adventures and moral dilemmas, into which certain documentary materials have been incorporated like some big footnotes, which may also be neglected. Others will be convinced that they are watching a contemporary document about the still-living authors of our first sound film, combined with huge quotations from the film itself, like in some sort of “Time-machine” dedicated to the beginnings of our cinema. *Feel free to choose one or the other approach and impression*, it depends solely on what you consider *first* and what *second*, whether

you move from the *present* towards the *past*, or from *fiction* to *reality*. The third approach, the one that would please me the most, I would call *rotational*: the film is now fictional, now documentary, the one paying close attention to it has to keep “re-aligning” him/herself. . . . This “re-alignment” is possible because all the fragments are long enough to avoid the effect of “film associations.”³³

The “truth” of a film, of a work of art, is not to be located in its textual fabric, which lends itself to governing, to controlling, the viewer-recipient’s comprehension of it as long as it continues to function as a vehicle of the supposedly “objective” meaning contained in it. Rather, the truth resides in the process of each individual spectator’s dynamic engagement with the work, in the gesture whereby a subjectivity anchors, so to speak, an artistic text’s (or, for that matter, any sociocultural discourse’s) specific way of functioning, its specific way of producing meaning. One of Makavejev’s favorite techniques used to foreground, to make manifest, this type of activity during the film-viewing situation is, as Armes put it, “to set up an emotional charge in one scene and then, by well-timed cutting, carry this emotion over into the following sequence to which the spectator, left to his own devices, might well have responded very differently.”³⁴ Rather than simply affirming, or opposing, the concrete ideological postulates incorporated into his films, Makavejev *invites the viewer to define his or her own position vis-à-vis* this ideological bundle. In the filmmaker’s own words, once again:

If you have a number of disparate things in the film, if one scene is connected not only with the preceding one and the following one, but connected also with a dozen others, . . . then *according to your own mood, according to your own interest* in politics, or sex, . . . or humor, you will see different shapes. . . . Some people are strongly moved by Stalin, other people are moved by sexual freedom. So you have . . . shapes that are overlapping, overlapping shapes. . . . [T]his borderline experience with this double image is actually your emotional content put into some shape that is really something else.³⁵

This montage effect of “overlapping shapes” is also what differentiates Makavejev’s version of the dialectical approach to film form from that of Sergei Eisenstein, whose theoretical and practical work the Yugoslav filmmaker greatly admired and closely studied. In the well-known

essay “The Dramaturgy of Film Form” (1929) Eisenstein elaborated “dialectical montage” (the possibilities of which he explored most radically in his 1928 film *October*) as a method aimed at engaging the viewer to respond to shot juxtapositions in an active but exact fashion, generating precise concepts and ideas. For Makavejev, however, montage is dialectical first and foremost insofar as it *destabilizes* the singularity and certainty of textual meaning and invites a number of possible responses from the viewer. The Yugoslav filmmaker seems intent on making possible *through montage* what, according to Andre Bazin, has historically been its function to deny (and what only the more realist, *mise-en-scène* oriented approaches to cinema—those grounded in the use of deep focus and the long take—have been capable of achieving). Writes Bazin in his famous essay “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema”:

In analyzing reality, montage presupposes of its very nature the unity of meaning of the dramatic event. . . . In short, montage by its very nature rules out ambiguity of expression. . . . On the other hand, depth of focus reintroduced ambiguity into the structure of the image. . . . The uncertainty in which we find ourselves as to the spiritual key or the interpretation we should put on the film is built into the very design of the image.³⁶

In Makavejev’s work, however, one finds evidence of the fact that, *pace* Bazin (and despite the fact that his views, crucial in the development of postwar film theory, have played an important role in inspiring the antididacticism of the New Yugoslav Film), equivocation and uncertainty can also be built into the very montage design of a film: that an Eisenstein-inspired technique may *itself* successfully give rise to a polyphony of perceptual and intellectual reactions. (After all, it is too often and too easily forgotten—and the legacy of Bazin’s own, rather rigid, understanding of Eisenstein has not been helpful in this respect—that in his post-*October* period the versatile Soviet filmmaker was himself already at work on testing the possibilities of a “democratic” approach to film form, one driven precisely by the equality, and equivocation, of the multiple textual stimuli: the “over-tonal” montage.)³⁷

Face-to-face with Makavejev’s film collages, every viewer is supposed to actively supply his or her own political and cultural predispositions, his or her own experiences and sensibilities. The process of deciphering the

ideological, social, and ethical implications of all the juxtapositions, possible associations, and contradictions established between the films' disparate images and sound tracks may be described as productive precisely insofar as it manages to involve the viewer (the more passionately, the better) in comparing and contrasting his or her own convictions, prejudices, desires, with the variety of textually disseminated (and contextually almost always destabilized) ones. In the final analysis it is a "debate"—taking place along the spectator-text axis—that is at stake here. What is, therefore, expected of each viewer-participant is to fully assume the responsibilities accompanying the freedom granted to him or her, to choose a specific perspective, a concrete idea, he or she will stand for.³⁸

The terms of this debate unfolding in the cinema cannot, however, be equated with some sort of simplistic endorsement of complete interpretative relativism. For, notwithstanding the pluralist thinking it aspires to encourage, Makavejev's work does, in the end, implicitly presuppose a basic leftist political inclination of its viewer-participants.³⁹ Yet it is precisely on account of this point that the question also has to be raised: does not the ultimate measure of one's "responsible" attitude toward the freedom of choice reside precisely in questioning the structural limits of freedom itself? Are not the views, decisions, acts (as well as the "libidinal currents") of even the most autonomous individual—of the "liberated individual" promoted by humanist theory—always already those of a *subject produced* within, and by, a wider network of socioideological factors? Perhaps the truly liberated, and the most productive, viewer of Makavejev's films would, therefore, have to be an individual invested with a degree of "Althusserian" self-consciousness—a subject whose active spectatorial choices are underwritten (but far from undermined) by an awareness of being inescapably *caught inside* ideology. (A subject perhaps somewhat akin to the protagonists of Godard's *Le gai savoir*, of Miklós Jancsó's *The Red Psalm*, or of Želimir Žilnik's *Early Works* (fig. 1.7)—a 1969 film literally, but



FIGURE 1.7 *Early Works* (Želimir Žilnik, 1969)

this time ironically, titled after Marx's writings and distinguished as *the* work of New Yugoslav Cinema most explicitly concerned with diagnosing the ideological limits and deviations of the 1960s political radicalism, while at the same time acknowledging its own indebtedness to it.)⁴⁰

The Raw Image

A clear diagnosis about the absurd senselessness of reality is by itself an undisputedly positive reactant. Even if it does not cure, it gives rise to an irresistible urge to be cured.

Miroslav Krleža (quoted by Živojin Pavlović)

The relationship between individual freedom and collectively defined social interests and norms is also one of the key themes of Živojin Pavlović's oeuvre, masterfully pursued in such films as *The Enemy* (1965), *When I Am Dead and Pale* (1968), and *See You in Another War* (1980). And while Makavejev (and *Praxis* intellectuals) worked primarily within the framework of Marxist-humanist theory, invested in the idea of constructive socialism, Pavlović tended to consider the problem of freedom from a historically less-specified and politically less-optimistic perspective, which included humanist ideals as themselves also an object of critique.⁴¹

His work developed along a trajectory that may be seen as a highly condensed version of the evolutionary path of the language of cinema, as outlined by Bazin in his above-mentioned, seminal essay. Pavlović's earliest films—amateur productions made under the auspices of the cine-club "Belgrade" (*Triptych on Matter and Death*, 1960; *Labyrinth*, 1961) and the first professional shorts (*Living Waters*, 1962; *The Ring*, 1963)—are formalist, rhetorically driven works, made by a critic-turned-filmmaker, who, heavily inspired by the Soviet revolutionary cinema in general and Eisenstein's theory and practice in particular, invested himself in montage fragmentations and reconstitutions of space, in visual symbolism and metaphoric modes of expression.

Gradually, however, Pavlović began to discover the directorial possibilities contained in an altogether different approach to cinematic form: an approach grounded in a heightened authorial respect for the

integrity of the profilmic reality, in the use of lengthy camera takes, and the so-called integral narration (the camera following the action, subordinating its movements to the narrative content, rather than seeking to realize a predetermined pattern of shots, of incomplete but interdependent framings that, edited together, would create a synthetic filmic space and a sense of unified action). It was some entirely practical considerations—having to do with the blocking and editing of certain scenes in his first feature, *The Return* (1965)—that initially triggered this discovery. But what began in *The Return* as a brief and unplanned, instinctive departure from the “expressionist” abstraction of space (as Bazin would have it) subsequently developed into Pavlović’s increasingly systematic use of deep-focus cinematography and elaborate staging of action across multiple spatial planes: it developed into a distinct realist style.

The film that marked a high point of this style is Pavlović’s fourth feature, *When I Am Dead and Pale*. With *The Rats Are Awakening* (made a year earlier, in 1967) and *The Ambush* (produced in 1969), this piece of rough cinematic naturalism—a portrayal of life on the margins of economic existence—forms part of an informal “trilogy” of socially engaged works, representative of the director’s obsession with what he termed “poetics of viciousness” and “aesthetics of the disgusting.”⁴²

When I Am Dead and Pale tells the story of Janko Bugarski, nicknamed Džimi Barka (“Jimmy the Boat”), a young man in his twenties who, having no permanent employment or regular living habits, aimlessly wanders around the Serbian province, distinguished by impoverished, dilapidated workers’ settlements, collective farms, and village fairs—all places evocative of harsh living conditions and marked by an overall “antiaesthetic” visual appearance (ugliness). Centered around its protagonist’s “journey through life,” the film has a loose, episodic narrative structure, akin to that of a “road movie.” Jimmy is an ambitionless and disoriented character—in the director’s own words, “a man without a compass”—whose nomadic and, in no small measure, absurd life ends abruptly and in an equally absurd manner: in the film’s memorable final scene, he is shot to death on a toilet.⁴³

Jimmy is not particularly representative of the protagonists commonly found in Pavlović’s films and literature (besides being a director, he was also an established novelist, essayist, and author of short stories).

Typically, his characters tend to be ideologically disillusioned individuals—often disappointed communists (as is the case in *The Ambush* and *The Red Wheat*, made in 1970)—who embody the gap between ideological idealism and practice/reality, the discrepancy between “how we would like things to be” and “how they in fact are.” Knowing “neither what he wants, nor what he does not want,” Jimmy is, by contrast, envisioned as a representative of a state of mind that Pavlović thought widespread among the Yugoslav youth in the mid-1960s (the period preceding the student uprisings of 1968): an intellectual and moral apathy, an attitude of resignation toward issues of ideology, provoked by an all-out exhaustion of the grand narratives of human emancipation, be they traditional (religion) or modern (Marxism).⁴⁴

Yet even if he is disoriented, Jimmy does not lack energy, vitality: the force of life pulsates strongly in him. For film scholar Nebojša Pajkić this suggests that he is not simply a character without any identity but a social outcast whose life is a trajectory without a past or a future, a series of intense moments belonging only to the permanent present.⁴⁵ In the film Pavlović emphasizes this dimension of his character by presenting the viewer with a succession of scenes typically deprived, in the process of editing, of proper dramatic exposition and resolution—a technique inspired by Godard’s elliptical approach to narrative in films such as *Breathless* (1959). Thus, Jimmy may also be understood as a local, Yugoslav version of Godard’s Michel Poiccard (Jean-Paul Belmondo) or as something of an equivalent of such literary antiheroes as Saul Bellow’s Augie March (*The Adventures of Augie March*) or Jack Kerouac’s Dean Moriarty (*On the Road*).⁴⁶

Each stop on Jimmy’s journey is defined by a relationship with a different woman: first Lilica, his pickpocketing partner; then Duška, a roadhouse singer; Mica, a postal worker; an unnamed dentist’s assistant; and, once again, Lilica. All of these characters are portrayed as more decisive than Jimmy and superior to him in their ability to economically sustain themselves. But their identities and aspirations remain clearly formulated within the patriarchal framework: despite, or perhaps because of, Jimmy’s complete lack of commitment, the women in the film function as agents of his (potential) social integration. Partnership with Lilica (ever ready to fake pregnancies) is the best way to sustain the lifestyle of a

social parasite. Duška begins to build Jimmy's career as a folksinger (despite his horrendous voice). Mica provides him with a temporary home (she is the clearest maternal surrogate in the film—fig. 1.8) and gives a further boost to his career by helping “institutionalize” him as a singer in the military garrisons. The dentist's assistant expects Jimmy to stop wandering, marry her, and lead a life of social and economic stability. Yet, as some recent analyses of the film have pointed out (Branko Dimitrijević, Goran Gocić), although the behavior of the female characters seems to reinforce the standard patriarchal myth about the “taming” of the unbound male Eros, at the same time it is Jimmy—and not his female companions—who is regularly sexually objectified, fetishized.⁴⁷ Thus, for example, he temporarily occupies the place of the “young male game” in Duška's busy sexual life, and he satisfies aging Mica's fantasy about still



FIGURE 1.8 *When I Am Dead and Pale* (Živojin Pavlović, 1969)

being sexually desirable. But after his miserable failure at a singing competition in Belgrade, Jimmy responds to the dentist assistant's complaint that his aimlessness is ruining her life by hitting her in the face. With this aggressive manifestation of his frustration over a feeling of impotence ("Do you think I wouldn't want things to be better?" he asks, standing in front of a prominently displayed Yugoslav flag), Jimmy's wandering is also revealed as grounded in a crisis of patriarchal masculinity. His persistent refusal to accept the society's rules of the game has, partially at least, been a refusal to assume those roles and "duties" that the decidedly patriarchal order he inhabits has carved out for him.

Firmly situated at the forefront of *When I Am Dead and Pale's* visual register is the unobtrusive, antirhetorically conceived sequence shot, a stylistic device deemed most suitable for tracing the complexities and the ambiguities of the multilayered profilmic reality. Often evocative—in its apparent absence of directorial intervention—of documentarist factography, the film largely realized Pavlović's (by then clearly articulated) ideal of "creating an atmosphere that will by no means seem arranged, but rather as a consequence of incidental occurrences."⁴⁸ An acclaimed example of this approach is found in the long panning shot set in a provincial workers' settlement, depicting Jimmy and an army officer walking by a group of chatting peasants, then crossing paths with some protesting workers (who criticize the building of "political factories"), while in the far background a platoon of singing soldiers is on the move, followed by a group of playful children.⁴⁹ Also frequently praised by critics is the scene of the singing audition in Belgrade, in which the emerging urban youth culture of the mid-1960s is contrasted with the thus far depicted culture of the provincial Serbia. Featuring the Black Pearls (one of the earliest Yugoslav rock bands), this scene is entirely filmed in the cinema vérité style. In its lengthy opening shot the camera patiently focuses on the drummer awaiting his cue; once he energetically begins to play, it embarks on a sideways track, revealing the location and introducing other musicians.⁵⁰

Pavlović's propensity for integral narration, for the *mise-en-scène* driven organization and control of space (radically different from the montage-based approach of his colleague and friend Makavejev) may be partially attributed to his burgeoning infatuation with Italian neorealist cinema—Luchino Visconti (his *Ossessione* of 1942, in particular), Antonio

Pietrangeli, and Mario Monicelli—as well as to his admiration of such older masters as Jean Renoir and Carl Theodor Dreyer. Yet Pavlović never considered realism to be a goal unto itself but rather a formal strategy, an instrument, in the service of his cinema’s central objective of confronting the viewer with the “drastic” or “raw” image—an image capable of triggering a powerful visceral reaction, commonly a mixture of shock and disgust. “How is it possible,” he asked in *Poetics of Viciousness*, a series of theoretical essays written in the early 1960s, “to bring the human being to the point of emotional catharsis by consistently triggering in him repulsive reactions?”⁵¹ Putting a naturalist style of filmmaking in the service of the drastic image’s “unpleasant associativity” seemed to Pavlović like the most effective solution, so he strove to “nurture the irrational while firmly respecting the laws of cinematic realism.”⁵² Thus, one invariably finds in his films images depicting the “uglier side” or reality: images of decay (urban and rural), filth, social maladjustment, drunken brawling, people stabbing each other with knives, defecating, excessively cursing, rolling in mud, engaging in violent sex in dilapidated barns and roadhouses, and more. The killing of Jimmy at the end of *When I Am Dead and Pale*—culminating in the final shot of the film’s dead protagonist sitting on the toilet, while the camera slowly dollies in to reveal his bloody face (fig. 1.9)—masterfully accomplishes what is perhaps best understood as the channeling of an entire narrative trajectory toward its resolution in a “raw” image.

It is through this desire to aesthetically nurture the impulsive, the irrational, and, ultimately, the destructive manifestations of human existence that the formative influence of Eisenstein’s theory and practice on Pavlović’s work exhibits its enduring effects. For the “drastic/raw” image of Živojin Pavlović is directly rooted in Eisenstein’s early theory of “montage of attractions,” which defines attractions precisely as intense, aggressive stimuli, as physiological “shocks” directed at the audience with the aim of provoking a visceral reaction.⁵³ *Poetics of Viciousness* is replete with references to the greatness, the genius, of Eisenstein:

The foremost poet of brutality, the one who used strictly cinematic tools to extrapolate its overtonality—its “over-brutality” (possible only in true art)—was certainly S. M. Eisenstein. Wherever he engages the piercing power of

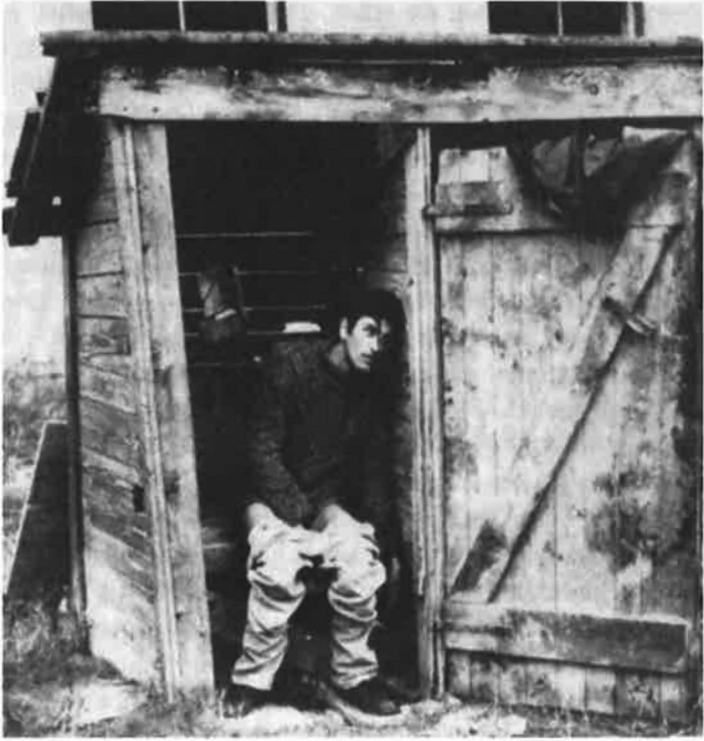


FIGURE 1.9 *When I Am Dead and Pale* (Živojin Pavlović, 1969)

associative destruction, at whatever point in his work—whether as an element of a larger event (the raising of the bridge in *October*); or, as the true sense of a state of being (the procession and the separator in *The General Line*); as the amplitude of an event, its central axis of meaning (as in the “Odessa Steps”); or, as the climax of a tragedy (peons’ death in *Que Viva Mexico*)—he manages to achieve its maximum concentration, while also avoiding turning it into a self-sufficient goal; instead, he enriches it with cine-poetry, a pure kinesthetic poetry . . . aligned with the author’s fundamental obsessions.⁵⁴

But Eisenstein developed the theory of “montage of attractions” within the framework of his famously antinaturalist approach to art. He spoke of attractions as aggressive stimuli that are sufficiently independent, even arbitrary, in relation to the work’s proper diegetic content. In Pavlović’s

cinematic practice, on the other hand, the intense physiological impact of the “raw” image crosses paths, coexists, with the declared “Bazinian” desire to maintain respect for the integrity of the profilmic reality. For him, attractions are an essential element of cinema, but they are truly effective only when interpolated into the profilmic continuum. (In this respect it is quite telling that besides Eisenstein, it was Luis Buñuel who, in Pavlović’s view, excelled in producing drastic images, true cinematic attractions; but it was primarily those of his works “unburdened by the surrealist caprice and [montage] artificiality”—*Los Olvidados*, *El*, and *Land Without Bread*—that interested the New Film auteur.)

A question, therefore, has to be asked at this point: after attractions have been integrated into the profilmic continuum—after they have been deprived of their fundamentally antinaturalist quality, as autonomous elements in the montage chain—is there any reason why they should still be thought of as “Eisensteinian”? After all, the Soviet filmmaker himself explicitly warned against an attraction being allowed to exist “within the limits of the logical action,” to “rest within,” or to “operate beneath,” the overt dramatic content of the work.⁵⁵ Is, then, Pavlović’s realist modification of film attractions in the end any different from, say, Jean Mitry’s proposed reconceptualization of the same—a reconceptualization that, as Jacques Aumont clearly demonstrated, so fundamentally missed the antinaturalist character of Eisenstein’s cinema by seeking to tame its formalist “excesses” through a docile reinstatement of the primacy of narrative logic? Writes Aumont, in his critique of Mitry’s retailoring of Eisenstein’s theory:

Reality should not be “betrayed,” nor are we justified in “interpreting” or “taking advantage” of it. Since Eisenstein pays precious little attention to the rules of the “lifelike,” the “concrete,” or the “implied,” his crimes are almost complete, and Mitry scarcely has time, particularly with *October* and *Strike*, to deal with all the ways in which they deviate from his norms; there are whole pages in which he “invalidates” most of the metaphors in *October*, positing against their “bad” montage of attractions, a “good” reflex montage, by which he means a montage that “uses only those symbols determined by the content. In other words, a montage of significant facts maintained and understood within the limits of the unfolding logic of the narrative action.”⁵⁶

There is, however, something about the intended aim of the “raw/drastring” image that makes it distinct from (and, therefore, not quite reconcilable with) Mitry’s project. Even though the formal means Pavlović employs to induce the “unpleasant associativity” of the image differ from those favored by Eisenstein, the primary status of such an image as the mediator of the viewer’s relation to the diegetic world still remains squarely within the framework of the latter’s thought. That is to say, for Pavlović, as for Eisenstein, attractions or “raw” images function as accentuated visual elements channeling or directing the process of spectatorial investment in the diegetic reality. Eisenstein envisions this process as directed toward the realm of the “logical action”: by causing intense visceral reactions, attractions provide the viewer with external points of entry into the film’s dramatic and thematic content (this “externality” being a consequence of Eisenstein’s antinaturalist foregrounding of discontinuous montage). The viewer’s response to an autonomous, independent attraction—a response that is initially physiological but, as Eisenstein’s conception of montage develops, begins to incorporate emotions, psychology, and, of course, intellect—is carried over a cut, transposed into (or onto) the narrative.

Pavlović, on the other hand, wishes to orientate the operation of spectatorial channeling in the opposite direction: his “drastring” images are intended to effect a denaturalization of the viewer’s comprehension of the “logical action,” to obstruct his or her perception of the diegesis. To fully grasp what is at stake here, one has to turn to the central philosophical problem at the core of much of Pavlović’s cinematic and literary oeuvre: the problem (posed in rather Nietzschean terms) of human nature stretched between its two, ultimately irreconcilable, poles. On one side there is life as a biological phenomenon: as a pulsating, irrational force, a series of drives for food and sex but also for violence and destruction. On the other side is that “carcinoma of nature” that distinguishes humans from all other living beings: consciousness. Seeking to make human existence pleasurable, or at least tolerable, consciousness, in the end, always either “degenerates life itself or, its own efforts result in failure.”⁵⁷

Proceeding from such an understanding of the human condition, Pavlović assigns to art the function of socially destructive criticism: of expressing the “paroxysms of existence,” of tapping into an “unhealthy ground” on which the affective, impulsive forces and the senseless acts

manifest themselves in situations of suspended or, at least, loosened consciousness. And it is precisely along those lines that he also interprets Eisenstein's notion of attractions. Reflecting on his fascination with *The Battleship Potemkin*, the filmmaker points out:

I went to see it. And the film literally crushed me. Afterwards, I recuperated and began to think: what was it about this film that impressed me so strongly that I stopped liking everything I saw before. That is how I arrived at montage. But this was merely an illusion. . . . For what fascinated me so much about the film was above all the "Odessa Steps" sequence. And "Odessa Steps" are not merely about montage. "Odessa Steps" are, first and foremost, grounded in irrational directing—not random directing, but directing given to foregrounding the force of irrationality; a force which films are only occasionally capable of attaining, but when they do, nothing can surpass this grandiosity, this power. Of course, it was only later that I realized: what allured me toward Eisenstein and his film was not strictly montage.⁵⁸

For Pavlović, then, the most significant feature of Eisenstein's technique is that it supplements the film image with outbursts of irrationality, of the "unaccountable." Attractions do not simply assist or guide one's perception of the image; rather, they confront the viewer (in a rather Batailleian fashion) with the unknowing of the represented reality, with what might be described as a loss of "perceptual digestibility" of the profilmic. Understood thus, attractions or "raw" images cannot but be integrated into the diegesis; they cannot but be presented in a "Bazinian" manner—as visceral stimuli interpolated into the profilmic continuum, existing within "the unfolding logic of the narrative action." For their function is none other than to outline the limits of legibility of this continuum, of this logic of action. In films made by Živojin Pavlović an attraction marks the ultimate failure ("denaturalization"!) of the total comprehensibility of the signified. It permits the impulsive, the irrational, the nonsymbolizable, to have its revenge—in no less than the arena of cinematic naturalism—on that "carcinoma of nature" that is the spectatorial cogito. An attraction prevents the image from being fully consumed by what Eisenstein himself referred to as the "retardations of conscious volition."⁵⁹

Finally, it is only when considered against the backdrop of such a conception of the film image that the precise nature of social critique

found in a work like *When I Am Dead and Pale* can be fully grasped. The film offers a demythologizing portrayal of the Yugoslav socialist everyday, a vision in sharp contrast to the official, state-sponsored stories of general prosperity taking place under the sign of an enthusiastic collective commitment to the communist goals. Specifically, following on the trail of a large-scale economic reform introduced by the federal authorities in 1965, *When I Am Dead and Pale* takes the viewer on a tour of what may unambiguously be read as symptoms of this reform's failure. Moreover, this diagnosis revolves around the film's central premise's stating that from any "socially constructive" point of view imaginable, the main character, Jimmy the Boat, cannot be seen as anything but entirely useless, "pure waste." Not only is he regularly unemployed, but (much like Accatone and other such protagonists of Pier Paolo Pasolini's borgata films) he prefers not to have to work at all (at one point he even openly boasts that he is "too lazy to work"). In a manner paralleling his induction of the "perceptual indigestibility" of the raw image, Pavlović uses this "inassimilable" dimension of Jimmy's personality as the key point of reference inside the narrative: in relation to it, the Yugoslav system of "socialist self-management"—which envisioned workers as decision makers, as direct participants in the management of production—comes across as a system perpetually concerned with managing the appearance of productivity and social prosperity. As film critic Saša Radojević lucidly observed,

all that is expected of the many characters in the film . . . who constantly talk about work, but actually do not work, is socialization. No one is desperate because there is no production, but because there is no socialization. Proletarians and soldiers are not supposed to enthusiastically fulfill their duties at work, but to endorse a spirit of friendship and leisure, a castration of revolt that might bring down the glass-tower in which the foundational myths of the socialist society are piled up.⁶⁰

By the early 1970s, a politicized offensive against the New Film's tendency toward overt social criticism was gaining momentum. Led by the dogmatic cultural watchdogs of the Yugoslav socialist establishment, the offensive focused on the harmful, even "subversively antisocialist," views that have, supposedly, severely contaminated Yugoslav cinema, giving rise to what would be labeled its "black wave."⁶¹ According to some unfavorable

opinions expressed at the time, directors such as Aleksandar Petrović, Makavejev, Žilnik, and, above all, Pavlović—whose ominous, unscrupulously destructive authorial vision proved itself a particularly fertile ground for frequent attacks on him as a paradigm of damaging “social nihilism”—painted in their films a picture of the entire country as nothing more than “one big toilet.”⁶² Consequently, a number of “black wave” films encountered various sorts of official and unofficial bans on their releases: Žilnik’s *Early Works*, Pavlović’s *The Ambush* (which, although never officially banned, was held out of distribution until the early 1990s), Petrović’s *Master and Margarita* (1972; based on Mikhail Bulgakov’s novel by the same name), Makavejev’s *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* (cleared for screenings abroad but not at home). Other films, such as Žilnik’s *Freedom or Cartoons* (1972)—ostensibly loosely inspired by Marx’s *Das Kapital* (which Eisenstein, much more famously, desired to put on the screen decades earlier)—were never permitted to be completed. The offensive against the black wave culminated in 1973 when, as a result of the scandal caused by student Lazar Stojanović’s film *Plastic Jesus*, Petrović and Pavlović were declared morally, politically, and pedagogically “inappropriate” and were removed from their teaching posts at the Belgrade Academy of Dramatic Arts (Pavlović continued to direct in Slovenia, where he completed four features during the 1970s). *Plastic Jesus* would soon become known as the only film in the history of Yugoslav cinema whose author was imprisoned for his creation.

Tito and Jesus

This expression, the “Black Wave,” was invented by some people who were building their political careers at the time. . . . In fact, their imagination was very wild, politico-pornographic, and they took for granted much more than we did, in our own, naïve, ways. These passionate pursuers brought an enormous amount of darkness into our films, having been obsessed both with the need for that darkness, and the need to cleanse themselves of it. Thus were our films, as “black films,” used for some social exorcism, for the spiritual release in some people, . . . but this had nothing to do with us.

Dušan Makavejev

Made in 1971, *Plastic Jesus* was Lazar Stojanović’s thesis project.⁶³ Like Makavejev’s films discussed earlier, it is a work of collage structure. Its fic-

tional color segments depict the adventures of the main character, Tom, a Croatian filmmaker living in Belgrade, while the black-and-white, primarily documentary, footage—pertaining to the Second World War and the postwar Yugoslav history (up to the late 1960s)—establishes a larger socio-political context within which the film's central narrative evolves (fig. 1.10).

Stojanović began writing the script and raising the budget for his film in 1968. At the time a common practice at the Belgrade Academy of Dramatic Arts was that graduating students would produce thirty-minute-long works that would subsequently be combined into feature-length, theatrically released programs—the so-called omnibus films. These student shorts were typically paid for by state funds, but having secured some additional financing from the Belgrade-based distribution company *Centar Film*, Stojanović decided to attempt a feature-length production. The goal seemed reasonable given the abundance of archival material he was, from the outset, planning to incorporate into the film.

According to the director, choosing the appropriate way to portray the film's protagonist, Tom, was from the outset an issue of great importance. At the time Tom Gotovac was already an eminent performance artist and experimental filmmaker whose works—*Morning of a Fawn* (1963), *Direction* (1964), and especially *Circumference* (1964, an early example of the type of structural-minimalist cinema soon to be made famous by



FIGURE 1.10 *Plastic Jesus* (Lazar Stojanović, 1971)

Michael Snow)—were regarded as some of the most important conceptualist products from ex-Yugoslavia, and Eastern Europe in general. “My own film, however, was nothing like a documentary about Gotovac,” explains Stojanović. “I sought to create a situation in which the audience wouldn’t find it easy to decide whether the short films attributed to my main character were good or rubbish. I have a character claiming that he is a filmmaker, he has his films shown, and yet it is still not clear whether he is producing something good and important or not.”

One of the last products of the Yugoslav black wave, *Plastic Jesus* plainly and directly addresses not only the issue of individual freedom but also the highly sensitive topics of past (World War Two) ethnic hatred among the South Slavs and the personality cult of the Yugoslav president, Josip Broz Tito. The film’s critique of the latter is built around the omnipresence of Tito’s persona in the sociopolitical and cultural life of the country. “I thought it was very funny,” Stojanović recalls, “that Tito’s photographic portraits were hanging everywhere, yet they were rarely shown in films. Furthermore, whatever happened in the country, whatever was decided, whatever new deal was made—it was always in Tito’s name, and in the name of the Communist Party. His birthday anniversaries were publicly celebrated by the ‘baton-rally’ which took place across the entire country. All this was in my opinion very Nazi-like.”⁶⁴

The overwhelming presence of the president serves as an important, if initially downplayed, element of the social and cultural climate which the film recreates. In such a climate the film’s protagonist, an aspiring filmmaker coming from the bottom of the social ladder, is placed along a diegetic path that—owing to the “divine” intervention of the force known as film montage—ultimately leads to an encounter with Marshall Tito himself, the foremost state authority, the figure at the very top of the power structure. The national leader, the final arbiter of all key aspects of sociopolitical existence, on the one hand, and Tom, an experimental artist and a libertarian, on the other hand, cross paths at that point in the narrative when the latter is arrested by the police because of his parasitical and seemingly useless lifestyle. Immediately following Tom’s arrest, Tito appears “in person” (for the first time in the film) by way of an excerpt from his famous speech—delivered to the nation via television—which brought about the end of the 1968 uprising of Yugo-

slav students. Placed within *Plastic Jesus*'s narrative about Tom's escapades, the original meaning of this documentary footage underwent a modification: it now came to function as an assurance to the public that the conflict between Tom and the police is under control and that it is being resolved under the personal supervision of the Marshall himself.

As a collage film, *Plastic Jesus* differs from Makavejev's *Innocence Unprotected* and *WR* in at least two major ways. First, while he is just as invested as Makavejev (or, for that matter, Pavlović) in the issue of individual freedom, Stojanović focuses less on each spectator's role as an autonomous producer of meaning (of *subjective* meaning) pertaining to the events transpiring on the screen. Rather, his immediate concern is with exposing and discrediting the deeply rooted authoritarian and collectivist foundation on which all oppressive political systems—different as they may be amongst themselves—inevitably rest.

Second, unlike Makavejev's films, *Plastic Jesus* does not really allow for the possibility of its disparate image tracks being related to each other in a dialectical fashion. On the contrary, Stojanović's work strives for what is perhaps best understood as a "montage-based anarchism" and a *global critique* of ideology: an effect of total leveling, a provocatively absolute equalization of the seemingly different ideological paths and political structures addressed in the film.⁶⁵ The three most explicit examples of this nondialectical strategy—influenced, in part, by the collagist work of the American underground filmmaker Bruce Conner (especially his experiments in false spatiotemporal continuity, achieved through the "Kuleshov effect")—are the following:

- comparison of communism and Nazism, by way of incorporating into the narrative—and without offering any value judgment—some World War Two documentary footage of both the Yugoslav communist-led Partisan forces and the German army;
- "equation" of Josip Broz and Adolf Hitler—again, by allowing the documentary footage of both leaders to coexist within the larger antihierarchical narrative;
- suggestion that the progressive, socialist and multinational Yugoslav society is rooted in retrograde ethnonationalist hatreds and intolerance—accomplished by freely, and without much attention to causality, juxtaposing the semidocumentary color segments of

Tom's adventures in the late 1960s with the black-and-white archival footage of the World War Two Serb and Croat nationalist forces (Chetniks and Ustashes).

Stojanović's strategy of cinematically equalizing disparate ideological strains—and, above all, his provocative implication of a continuity between the Nazi and communist power structures—proved transgressive enough to raise some serious concerns in the Yugoslav political establishment. Contradicting the communist regime's persistent efforts in maintaining the impression that the socialist reality of interethnic "brotherhood and unity," established after the war, will last forever, *Plastic Jesus* suggests, instead, the presence of "a phantom state of political affairs" in the historically shaky Balkans.⁶⁶ Using the propaganda materials depicting the advancement of the Nazi army across Europe, Stojanović evokes a notorious example of a political and military force that, while on the rise, also believed in its own eternity but that, some twenty years after its defeat, would be remembered only for its evils. Coexisting in the film with the documentary shots of the Yugoslav Partisans, this Nazi footage raises the possibility that the communist rule may too, sooner or later, come to its end. Consequently, Stojanović was charged with having produced a piece of "hostile propaganda" aimed at overthrowing the socialist regime and was sentenced to three years in prison. *Plastic Jesus* itself was, bizarrely enough, seized as an instrument of crime—"like a weapon with which murder has been committed"⁶⁷—and stored in police vaults, side by side with other "similarly" dangerous objects (axes, guns, etc). It stayed there until 1990, when it was finally "released" and granted an immediate theatrical run.

While undeniable, the boldness of the filmmaker's critical vision can, however, only partially account for the drastic course of events that befell Stojanović and his work. Additional "responsibility" for their fate, and for the similar fate of some other black-wave films (including *WR*, banned for domestic distribution some time before *Plastic Jesus*), rests with the broader (not specifically cinematic) sociopolitical turbulences in Yugoslavia of the early 1970s.

In 1968 massive student demonstrations took place across the country, with centers in the cities of Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana. The

protest marked the high point of an overall liberalized atmosphere made possible, among other things, by the increased democratization of the regional communist leaderships in a number of Yugoslav republics (Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia).

In Croatia, however, along with the reformist socialist program, a nationalist platform was also being developed, which gave rise to a populist movement, *maspok* (“mass movement”). The movement eventually acquired such momentum, and went to such extremes, that Tito and the Yugoslav federal leadership—at first tolerant toward the liberalism of the republican government—decided to take action. Initially, power was exercised by pressuring the republican authorities to settle their local affairs themselves. The republican leadership, itself invested in the issues of Croatian nationhood, did, indeed, ultimately distance itself from the political and cultural activities of the extreme nationalists and their intelligentsia,⁶⁸ but its insistence on maintaining an open public sphere, and its preference for political “tolerance and dialogue” over the use of a “firm hand,” did not in the end bring about a sufficiently strong or effective condemnation of the nationalist platform. (On the other hand, members of the Zagreb *Praxis* group from the outset strongly opposed *maspok*.) As Mirko Tepavac succinctly concludes, *maspok* “unfortunately weakened its democratic requests for reform of the centralist federation, by accepting support which came from Croatian nationalism, and even *ustashism* [a Croatian extremist movement, at its historical peak in the 1940s, during the existence of the fascist Independent State of Croatia].”⁶⁹ *Maspok*, this author further points out, was the first movement after the Peoples War of Liberation (1941–45) “to discover how impressively useful massive nationalism can be for political mobilization. Despite all the subsequent attempts, especially in recent times, to characterize *Maspok* (the ‘Croatian Spring’) as only democratic and not also as nationalist, [the movement] was led in a tactically equivocal, and politically incorrect way.”⁷⁰

Consequently, in 1971 a crackdown was exercised by the federal government on both *maspok* and the highest level of political authority in Croatia. Institutional purges and numerous arrests took place, bringing about the movement’s end. The crisis in Croatia—at the forefront of which were the sensitive issues of nationhood and nationalism—reflected, of course, on the overall situation in Yugoslavia, freezing for the moment

many political and social liberties and discouraging all attempts at critically addressing the question of interethnic relations in the country. The release of *Plastic Jesus*, a film concerned with precisely such issues (and, in addition, made by one of the Belgrade student activists), thus became impossible for the time being. Soon, however, political events in Yugoslavia would take yet another turn, and the situation with Stojanović's film would worsen even further.

This new political development took place in 1972. Another crackdown was performed by the federal authorities, this time on the reformist political elite in the republic of Serbia. The so-called Serbian liberals (who, among other things, distinguished themselves by a strongly nonnationalist perspective) did not, in Tito's view, do enough to prevent the spread of a variety of "negative phenomena," such as critique of state-centralism and economic liberalism. As soon as the top officials in the Communist Party of Serbia were removed from power, about a dozen student leaders, writers, intellectuals—most of them members of the 1968 protest—were arrested. Among the arrested was Lazar Stojanović, whose *Plastic Jesus* thus emerged as material evidence of sorts: as a concrete proof that the subversive tendencies and the danger of "counterrevolution"—against which the regime supposedly reacted—were, indeed, very real.⁷¹

The above-mentioned instances of political bans, police raids, and arrests announced the onset of a new political climate in the country: a reaffirmation of the local version of the hard-line bolshevist doctrine (gradually abandoned since the mid-1950s), grounded in the centralist control of power, monolithism of the Communist Party, and authoritarianism of the supreme leader (Tito). The *Praxis* group—whose activities had already been closely monitored—soon, too, came under an open attack from the authorities. In 1975 a group of eight professors, members of *Praxis*, were expelled from the University of Belgrade. In Zagreb, the journal *Praxis* was forced to cease publication (an issue of it had already been censored in 1971), and the internationally successful sessions of the *Praxis*-led "Korčula summer school"—which, for years, had been bringing together some of the foremost European and U.S. thinkers and scholars (Ernest Bloch, Herbert Marcuse, Zygmunt Bauman, Erich Fromm, Lucien Goldmann, Jürgen Habermas, Agnes Heller, Henri Lefebvre, and others)—were terminated.

To some extent political suppression of reformist social thought in the 1970s helped pave the way for the irrationalities of the narrow-minded, ethnonational mythomanias emerging in the 1980s. But *Praxis* theory was not without its own limitations either. In the late 1980s, when the political rift between the reformists and the conservative centralists manifested itself once again within the now-crumbling system of Yugoslav state socialism, some of the foremost *Praxis* thinkers in Serbia—Mihailo Marković, Ljuba Tadić, Svetozar Stojanović—sided with the ethnohegemonic project at the helm of which was placed Slobodan Milošević and in the process transformed their universal-humanist ideas into those of Serb national (pseudo)emancipation.⁷² A partial explanation for this transformation may, perhaps, be sought in the fact that, despite their extensive critique of authoritarianism and ideological rigidity, not all of *Praxis*'s multiple incarnations ultimately managed to overcome perceiving themselves as prescriptive narratives of human liberation. Facing the dissolution of the internationalist emancipatory idealism and the advancement, in its place, of particularist identity politics, some members of *Praxis* endorsed the megalomaniacal aspirations of the Serb nationalist *ressentiment*, which—proceeding from a falsified diagnosis about the “oppression” of the Serb ethnos but simultaneously making use of the deceptively “pro-Yugoslav” and metastasized socialist rhetoric of Milošević's regime (“antibureaucratic revolution”)—sought to impose its “remedial” judgment on the rest of the federation.

On the other hand, there are also members of *Praxis* (as well as other 1960s and 1970s reformists) inclined to align their past Marxist views with the ideas of contemporary social democracy and with certain (most progressive) values of liberalism.⁷³ While the voicing of such claims in the postcommunist era (amidst the climate of widespread *anti*-communism) may strike one as a bit too opportune, perhaps these claims should, indeed, be taken at face value and also criticized accordingly. That is, maybe a “weak spot” of *Praxis* resided precisely in the extent to which, proceeding from an apt critique of Stalinism, political bureaucracy, and the rigidity of the systems of “really existing socialism,” it overly neglected the importance of the struggle to *uphold* socialist and communist ideological hegemony. Thus, while advocating a return to the “true,” humanist Marx, *Praxis* also, ironically, laid the ground for

yet another type of departure from Marxism proper: it permitted too much political “neutralization,” too much deregulation of the ideological dimension inherent in the ideals of human freedom, civil society, democracy, pluralism, and so forth.

One of the most interesting aspects of *Plastic Jesus’s* turbulent history is the fact that after the film was seized by the state, it fell into the hands of the censors, who removed from it a scene that would never again be retrieved. This scene was documentary in nature and depicted the wedding of Ljubiša Ristić, a prominent Yugoslav theater director, who also played a minor role in the film (in the 1990s, Ristić became the president of the Yugoslav United Left, a powerful political organization headed by Slobodan Milošević’s wife, Mirjana Marković). Tom Gotovac attended the wedding as well, assuming the persona of the filmmaker he was portraying in *Jesus*. “Tom was supposedly filming the wedding with his little camera, while a beautiful relief profile of Tito, hanging on the wall, was overseeing all this.” “In the finished film,” Stojanović recalls, “at the point when the marriage ceremony ends and people disperse and start kissing and celebrating, I cut to the World War Two footage of Chetniks, Serbian nationalists and throat-cutters, also dispersing, dancing, and celebrating. When I was later on trial, the public prosecutor claimed that all this suggested that the children who will be born out of this socialist marriage will grow to become Chetniks.”⁷⁴

What had an even stronger, more direct bearing on the disappearance of this scene, however, is the fact that both the groom’s and the bride’s fathers were high-ranking Yugoslav army officials. Several of their friends attended the wedding, and, as it happened, they also turned out to be visible in the film. “As I later learned,” Stojanović explains,

the groom’s father and other state and army officials present in this scene, were mocked in the hallways of military and secret police. They were made fun of as “actors,” because they “starred” in my film. They were actually seriously blamed for allowing themselves to be present in a hostile film, despite the fact that at the time of the shooting they could not have possibly known what kind of work this will be. So, enraged by the way I used their appearance in the film,

they decided to remove themselves from it! That is how they chose to react to the unjust criticism of themselves by the authorities. Their supposed primary sense of duty—to “protect” Tito who, after all, has a much stronger presence in the film—was entirely neglected.⁷⁵

The filmmaker’s conclusion, however, about the censors’ complete failure to protect Tito’s name and figure from “hostile” criticism may not be entirely accurate. Some less immediately visible effects of this policing measure may be deduced, once the specifics of *Plastic Jesus’s* iconoclasm are taken fully into account.

Stojanović’s critique of Tito is similar on one level to the type of critique practiced by Makavejev in *Innocence Unprotected*. In both films one encounters a parody of Tito-as-icon, as the foremost socialist authority. And in both cases this parody revolves around exposing the very act in which *imaginary identification*—identification “with the image in which we appear likable to ourselves”⁷⁶—is realized. In *Innocence Unprotected* it is Dragoljub Aleksić who, posing for Makavejev’s camera, assumes an authoritarian posture reminiscent of that assumed by Tito himself in the portrait hanging behind the acrobat (fig. 1.11). In *Plastic Jesus* it is literally Tito who is exposed—in one of the film’s documentary segments—in the process of assuming his own, larger-than-life posture for the television camera, as he prepares to address the nation (fig. 1.12). In both cases parody is employed to suggest to the viewer that “the Leader is naked”: that the aura of greatness emanating from his (Tito’s) authoritarian appearance is, in fact, an effect of *the pose he has assumed*—which he has



FIGURE 1.11 *Innocence Unprotected* (Dušan Makavejev, 1968)



FIGURE 1.12 *Plastic Jesus* (Lazar Stojanović, 1971)

trained himself to assume. Showing the leader in the act of assuming his authoritative pose thus yields *disenchantment* with his iconic status—it exposes the unnaturalness of the image of power that otherwise would simply go unquestioned.

With this in mind it is possible to see the functions and effects of the censor's "intervention" into Stojanović's film as more complex than they initially may have appeared. The fact that certain representatives of Tito's regime—its proponents, as well as subjects—have decided to remove themselves from a hostile film, to prevent themselves from appearing in a film that criticizes and parodies the figure of Josip Broz, may be understood as indicative of their awareness that what is perhaps even worse than publicly admitting that "the leader is naked" is showing that there are those (in the leader's vicinity, no less!) who actually know this to be the case—*those who are, indeed, able to clearly perceive the leader in his nakedness*. From this perspective, what the censors sought—and managed—to accomplish with their molestation of Stojanović's film, was to prevent themselves from being identified with the perspective from which all the comic inferiority of the leader, "caught" in the act of putting on his authoritative makeup, could be acknowledged. By eliminating themselves from a subversive film, the censors reaffirmed their *symbolic identification* (as psychoanalysis would have it) with Tito as the most valuable icon of Yugoslav socialism and their own status as representatives of that ideological perspective from which the leader's nakedness is made imperceptible and, therefore, nonexistent.⁷⁷

Finally, taking into account the broader context of the New Yugoslav Film, its call for the assertion of multiple individual truths and for an active engagement of the variety of spectatorial subjectivities, it may even be said that in the case of *Plastic Jesus* the censors gave rise to a perversion of this objective. By acting on it *too literally*, by violently imposing their own particular perspective, the censors obliterated, once again, all distinctions between that particularity and its enforcement as the collective social norm.