# Dušan Makavejev

Arguably the most distinctive voice of the Yugoslav New Wave, Dušan Makavejev was born in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in 1932. Makavejev's professional career is importantly predated by his work in experimental and documentary cinema, which started at the Belgrade Cinema Club (Kino Klub). The importance of this semi-official aegis for young film-enthusiasts lied not only in the fact that it provided institutional, financial and technical support to create, but also in the fact that the creativity of young authors developed in a stimulating and ideologically relatively liberal environment. Makavejev's first documentary entitled The Sward Town (Jatagan Mala, 1953) is set in a Gypsy suburb of Belgrade, and brings to the light of the day the unadorned scenes of the life on the margins of the post-war Yugoslav society. The 1958 Don't Believe in Monuments (Spomenicima ne treba verovati), introduces another of the director's abiding thematic concerns: preoccupation with eroticism. With the 1962 documentary Parade (Parada), which cast a rather unorthodox – naturalistic and minimalistic, rather than monumental and epic – eye on the official May Day Military Parade, the set of thematic concerns and even cinematic styles, which would be developed and varied in most of Makavejev's feature films, were visibly articulated.

Makavejev's first feature Man is not a Bird (Čovek nije tica, 1965) is set in the industrialized, yet rural, Serbian east and charts two love relationship: between the abusive factory worker Barbulović and his subservient, unnamed wife, and the other, between mid-aged engineer Jan and his young mistress, the local hairdresser Rajka. Makavejev's portrayal of these relationships lays bare the less likeable features of Yugoslav society, which permeate both individual lives (domestic violence, adultery, etc.) and public sphere (bureaucracy, discontents of industrialization). His naturalistic eye records real people, who are caught in real-life situations and speak the real language of the populace. For the same reason, Makavejev's dramaturgy departs from the opportunistic, socially prescribed clichés and pushes the characters into disillusioning dead-ends. By emphasizing the failure of official culture to address the industrialized masses (academic performance of Beethoven to copper factory workers), by hinting at the alienation of the "new class" of party bureaucrats, and finally, by reminding us that happiness in life cannot be engineered in a way that industrial production can, Makavejev's cinematic revolution should be understood above all as a plea for a profound, top-to-bottom democratization of the social sphere.

The 1967 Love Affair, or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator deepens Makavejev's investigation into the themes of eros and ideology and furthers his examination of cinematic form. The film tells the story of the sanitation technician Ahmed and switchboard operator Izabela who meet one day on the streets of Belgrade and fall in love. By making often humorous use of local stereotypes (Izabela is an ethnic Hungarian, vivid and vagrant, while Ahmed is a Bosniak, Party member and social misfit) Makavejev stages a conflict between lovers by virtue of which he raises some of the vital questions of his filmmaking: are human desires and state ideology negotiable? Can we build socialism with human face? Resulting from Makavejev's own vision of montage (similar, but not reducible to Eisenstein's), Love Affair is a collage of narrative and documentary passages, in which the latter work as non-diegetic, Brechtian commentaries of the main narrative.

Makavejev next film, the 1968 Innocence Unprotected, was based on the first Yugoslav sound film of the same name, which was filmed during Nazi occupation. Makavejev used the

1942 film (a naïve action-melodrama featuring the local daredevil Dragoljub Aleksic) to create a complex assemblage in which the original film is intercut and juxtaposed with authentic wartime footage, newsreels, present-day documentary, etc. The effect Makavejev intended to achieve by the radical strategy of editing was to endow the original film with its (otherwise lacking) real historical context. On a more complex level, through the present-day interviews with the survived members of the original film crew, we learn a paradoxical truth about their (and perhaps not only their) filmmaking: the production was in their eyes seen as an act of resistance to the Nazi occupier, but on the other hand, it necessarily entailed various forms of implicit collaboration.

Enjoying the accolades of his last film (Innocence Unprotected won FIPRESCI Award and Silver Bear at Berlin Film Festival), Makavejev left for the United States on a one-year research stay in preparation for his long-awaiting project on the psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich. Makavejev was fascinated with Reich's work in more than one way: he approved of the German-American thinker's attempts to marry psychoanalysis and Marxism, was interested in Reich's theory of sexual drives, and perhaps above all, he was impressed by the opposition of Reich's ideas to oppressive state ideologies of all kinds (Soviet, Fascist, and capitalist). The filming of WR: Mysteries of the Organism in fact began during this prolonged American stay, but it will take Makavejev nearly three years to complete the production. The film is structured is two parts: present-day documentary material on Reich, and a fictional narrative, which is set in Belgrade and tells a tragic love story of the radical political and sexual emancipator Milena and Soviet ice-skating champion Vladimir Ilich. Similar to the technique he already used in Innocence Unprotected, Makavejev intercuts the two main narratives with a variety of documentary and feature material (footage from Nazi and Soviet psychiatric clinics, excerpts from Mikhail Chiaureli's 1948 film Vow), by which he created a dynamic visual and ideological assemblage. The two main narratives correspond to one another: while the documentary one pays an homage (not entirely uncritical one) to Reich's ideas and emphasizes the unfortunate faith of his theory of sexuality and social change in the American political monolith, the fictional one examines the possibility of marrying sexual drives and ideology in socialism. Alas, it turns out that Milena's partner Vladimir is the man of grand ideas, rather than deeds; he professes his love for universal humanity, but is incapable of loving an individual human being. Milena's attempts to prove that socialism with human face is possible are tragically denied: when Vladimir finally succumbs to her charm, he, unable to cope with the radical manifestation of his own individuality, kills her. The film premiered triumphantly at the 1971 Cannes Film Festival, won the special Lois Bunuel Prize and went on to harvest a number of other awards globally (Berlin, Chicago, etc.). However, in Yugoslavia, WR was banned for public screening and its author was met with stern disapproval. The release of WR overlapped in time with the end of a decade-long Yugoslav honeymoon of liberalism, after which the restoration of dogmatic practices ensued. As a result of the mounting political pressure, Makavejev leaves Yugoslavia in 1973.

Despite this existential setback, Makavejev's exilic debut Sweet Movie (1974) remains faithful to its author's idiosyncratic style and thematic concerns. The film follows the stories of two women, Miss World and Anna Planeta, each of them allegorically signifying the perils of feminine sexuality in two different political/value systems: the commodified female sexuality, which we find in capitalism (where Miss Canada's beauty and chastity were purchased for money by Mr. Kapital, her Texan oil-tycoon husband), and on the other hand, the libidinally unrestrained, but destructive desire of left revolutionary projects. Both characters embark on a journey of self-discovery: while Miss Canada leaves her abusive husband and travels to Europe

in pursuit of true love and emancipation, Anna sails the canals of Amsterdam haunted by the ghosts of her past. Her confession that the revolutionary journey entailed too many victims (comrades, lovers, even innocent children) is intercut with the Nazi footage of the excavation of bodies in the Katyn forest, by which Makavejev, more resolutely than in WR, betrays his pessimistic views of the direct correspondence between sexuality and political liberation. The two women meet and arguably reach redemption in Otto Muehl's Therapy Commune, in which they are set on a path to self-discovery through humiliation, rejection of social inhibitions and free sex.

For its rare audacity Sweet Movie was not received favourably by the post-liberal climate of the mid and late 1970s, and it will take the author seven years to realize his next project. In that interregnum, during which Makavejev held posts at several North-American universities, the world of auteur cinema also changed, which brought about a necessity for Makavejev to, at least formally, tie his creative pursuits more closely to genre cinema. Still, the 1981 Montenegro, or On Pigs and Pearls, which was advertised by its producer as a "comedy […] with a popular appeal and measured eroticism", retains many of Makavejev's concerns and even introduces new ones. Set in Sweden, the film tells the story of a seemingly settled, middle-class woman, who accidently finds herself in a murky, yet vivacious world of foreign workers. Marilyn, a show-case of bourgeois complacency, is confronted with the Rabelaisian, immediate and bodily world of foreign workers. Initially lost in the murky world of Yugoslav immigrants, Marilyn meets a young man called Montenegro, and it seems that all her constraints are gone with relish. Yet, like Vladimir of WR, Marilyn is startled by the newly recognised libidinal self, her awoken eros turns into thanatos and she kills her lover and then brings to ruin her entire world.

Produced in Australia, Makavejev's following project The Coca-Cola Kid (1985) tells the story of a young and ambitions American businessman (reminiscent of Mr. Kapital of Sweet Movie) who is sent to Australia by the Coca Cola Company to penetrate a part of the market hitherto controlled by a local businessman. Yet, Makavejev is not staging a David vs. Goliath type of conflict between an old-school entrepreneurial spirit and global capitalism, he rejects both sides in favour of a deliberately naive and romantic resolution in which the initially career-driven man reassesses his life, gives up all his pursuits for the love of his beautiful secretary. The 1988 *Manifesto, for a Night of Love* examines the possibilities of its genre with more success than Makavejev's previous two films. By taking on a loose form of political thriller – foiling a plot to assassinate a monarch in an imaginary Central-European country – Makavejev meditates unpretentiously on the themes of revolution, autocracy, and political freedom. His old theme of medical/ideological improvement of human frailties (Love Affair, WR) resurfaces in the film in Dr. Lombrosow conception of "natural re-education" only to be ridiculed and exposed as a strategy of torture. Another of Dr. Lombrosow's "invention", "permanent revolution rotor", which utilizes the physical energy of the revolutionaries to exhaust them (rather than to fuel the revolution), is a likely self-ironic reference to the Reichean idea that our political liberation is inseparable from the freeing of our senses.

In a number of ways, Makavejev's last feature Gorilla Bathes at Noon (1993) revisits his early work. A film-collage consisting of contemporary documentary feeds, Soviet war movies, and fictional narrative, the film tells the story of a disarmed Soviet officer Viktor Lazutkin, who remains adrift in Berlin after the fall of Berlin Wall and disintegration of the Eastern Bloc. The personal story of Lazutkin is typically used by Makavejev to make at times lucid comments on one of the turning points in modern European history, to meditate on historical winners and losers, and also, revisit the themes of political uprootedness and homelessness (introduced and

played with in Montenegro). Soon afterwards, with financial support of BBC Scotland, Makavejev ventured into a deeply personal, meditative and funny documentary A Whole in the Soul (1994), a film that could be described as a post scriptum, or requiem for a lost country, the former Yugoslavia. Finally, Makavejev's last feature is a 4 minute long feature Dreaming, which appeared as part of the 1998 portmanteau Danske piger viser alt/Danish Girls Show Everything. This short, but brilliant collage, in which still photographs of war atrocities coalesce with animal farm documentary, sequences from Manifesto and plotline of Agatha Christie's Murder in the Orient-Express, is the artist's statement, or rather a cry, against the brutality and senselessness of Yugoslav wars.