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Pavle Levi. *Disintegration in Frames: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Cinema*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. x + 203 pp. \$49.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-5368-5.

Reviewed by Matthew McCulloch (Department of Politics, International Relations and European Studies, Loughborough University)
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Identity beyond Boundaries?

Levi's book addresses the issue of how national identity was "approached, construed promoted, or critically dissected in film, video and television" in Yugoslavia and its successor states (p. 3). It achieves this aim by exploring the aesthetics of film, concentrating on image and sound, narrative (or lack thereof), and nature of *mise-en-scène*. However, this book is not solely an exercise in contemporary cultural studies, as Levi situates the books against the social and political context. In doing so, Levi is able to analyze the ideological impact of the films, which "are not strictly, or inherently, textual but are the result of the dynamic relationships of mutual influence established between the work themselves and their audiences" (p. 4).

Furthermore, the book adopts a position refuting the much-maligned stance on the sudden re-emergence of nationalism in the 1980s and 1990s as being a *rediscovery* of ancient identities. Rather, adopting the point of Slavoj Žižek, (a common trend in the work in general) the rediscovery of national identity worked as a "shock-absorber" to the sudden exposure to capitalist imbalance and openness (p. 6). The rediscovery represented a retreat to "pseudo-ethnic bonds" (quoting Wole Soyinka) in the face of the failure of politics (p. 6). What, therefore, made the ethnic atrocities horrific was the fact that there was little interethnic atmosphere in 1990. Returning to the main theme of the book, Levi chronologically analyzes Yugoslav films from the 1940s to the 1990s, with the final chapter exploring the problematic, yet common,

view of ethnicity as the main cause of the Bosnian war.

The first chapter is undoubtedly the longest and most thorough of the book, but given that the discussion deals with the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, this should not come as a surprise. Before the analysis of the films begins, there is a brief introduction refuting the dominant, and fashionable, notion that "ancient ethnic" tensions were responsible for the start of the war, but in this discussion Levi makes two pertinent points: first, he suggests that the failure of Yugoslavia was due to a failure to "uphold the political identity" of the federation, as a result of deadlock politics (p. 12); second, he cites the importance of the paternal figure of Tito and the void created by his death (a theme that re-emerges in many of the films analyzed).

Unsurprisingly, Yugoslav films for much of the 1940s and 1950s replicated the partisan experience of the fight against fascism and the communist revolution, yet according to Levi it was the 1960s that represented a golden age for Yugoslav cinema, as young filmmakers began to make films *outside* the ideological framework maintained by the socialist state. Called the "black wave" of Yugoslav cinema, this new wave of filmmakers was strongly critical of the Yugoslav socialism, but still worked within the guise of socialism in general. In this respect, the "black wave" sought to be critical of the Yugoslav system, but not of socialism as a political theory.

One of the most notable parts of the chapter is Levi's comparison of the work of Dušan Makavejev with that of

the Praxis movement that emerged in Yugoslavia in the 1960s. According to Levi, the essential aspect of Makavejev's films, including *Innocence Unprotected* (1968) and *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* (1971), is the incompatibility between the notion of human freedom and the various institutionalized and reified forms of social and political life. In this respect, Makavejev's main point of contention is similar to that of the Praxis group, and focuses on the relationship between the individual and society. For both groups, there can be no form of social organization formed *in advance* because collective social ideals cannot exist in themselves, independent of human praxis. Social organization is created as a result of human interaction.

As the "black wave" was critical of the established Yugoslav system, the official response began in the mid-1960s, and by the 1970s began to gain real momentum, culminating in the *Plastic Jesus* (1971) "affair" in which Lazar Stojanović was imprisoned after his film critiqued ancient ethnic hatreds of the south Slavs and the cult of Tito. Stojanović was charged with producing "hostile propaganda" and imprisoned for three years. The ironic point of the whole affair was that the film was seized as an instrument of a crime and kept alongside murder weapons in a police vault. Interestingly, this affair is contextualized against the wider clamp-down on the Praxis movement, the Croatian Maspok, and the purge of the Serbian liberals in the early 1970s.

The second chapter focuses on the rise of the "Prague School" in the 1970s and 1980s, which produced such films as Karpo A? imovi? Godina's *Medusa's Raft* (1980) and Slobodan Šijan's *The Marathon Man* (1981). It is in Šijan's film that one of the recurring themes in Yugoslav films appears most prominent: the paternal influence and his removal. For Šijan, the death of Pantelija, the head of the paterfamilias, is celebrated with a feast, in which one of the guest assumes that they are actually eating the body of Pantelija. Released in 1981, the comparison between the death of Pantelija and Tito raises "highly pertinent questions of the Yugoslav's relationship to their own, recently deceased, leader" (p. 61), and possibly prophesizes as to whether Tito's children would eat Tito, or indirectly themselves. The issue of Yugoslav identity and notions of "Yugoslavness" is then raised via the work of the New Primitive movement, which after a successful radio series infiltrated the mass media with "Top List of Surrealists," or TLS. In addition to being a Yugoslav version of Monty Python, TLS reassessed the issue of identity, as the series opposed both the establishment's view and that of the alternate growing nationalist identity and

rhetoric. Rather, for TLS: "Yugoslavs are actually surreal figures; these surreal figures cannot be thought of as anything other than Yugoslavs; that is, Yugoslavs are ... Yugoslavs, insofar as the 'authentic' Yugoslav being is found *only* in excess of any form of codified national identity asserted at any given point in time" (p. 75).

In this manner Yugoslav identity is contradictory, located at the crossroads of "nowhere" and "everywhere." TLS suspended *Tito's Way* (pp. 76-77), refusing either to endorse or refute the official line of "After Tito, Tito" (p. 77). In this respect, the Yugoslav identity promoted by TLS was "without limit" (p. 77), a feature revived in postwar Yugoslavia by the notion of Cyber-Yugoslavism (www.juga.com).

The issue of the paternal influence and the demise of Yugoslavia are dealt with in chapter 3 in relation to the work of Emir Kusturica. The imprisonment and death of the father in Kusturica's early films, *When Father Was Away on Business* (1985) and *Do You Remember Dolly Bell?* (1980), respectively, could be an analogy to death of Tito. In his later work, especially *Underground* (1995), the themes of the nature of Yugoslavia are discussed. While Marko becomes a successful career *apparatchik*, the workers are kept in the cellar, immune and insulated from the real world—an analogy to Tito's ability to shield Yugoslavia from the worst of the Cold War and international economic forces? Furthermore, the end scene of *Underground* demonstrates Kusturica's adherence to the TLS movement. The main characters, both living and dead, return for a giant feast, and a return to a *true* Yugoslavia, where the different individuals can live together. But for this to happen, the country needs to abstract itself from the external world, a point emphasized by the land on which the feast occurs breaking off from the shore and floating in the (presumably Drina or Danube) river. One final point Levi makes against Kusturica, is that in *Underground* especially, the notion of Yugoslavness shifts from the TLS Yugoslavia without limits, to the Yugoslavness of the Milošević regime, with this point emphasized by the apparent pro-Serb and anti-Croat nature of the premise of and film clips used in *Underground*.

The final two chapters are among the shorter ones and deal with Yugoslav film during the war and explore the notion that ethnicity was the primary factor behind the Bosnian War. The most interesting point of these chapters in relation to Yugoslav identity concerns Želimir Žilnik's *Tito among the Serbs for the Second Time* (1994). The documentary sent a man dressed as Tito into Bel-

grade and recorded people's reactions. The fact that people believed the actor to be Tito made it possible for the film to work, but this in itself showed that the notion of Yugoslavness had a strong "internal dimension," in which people still held and revered Tito (or the image of Tito) as a "symbolic power" (p. 123).

Despite the interesting analysis of the films and their relationship to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, there are two minor points that detract from the work. First, there is an imbalance in the chapters. The first is over forty pages long, while the others are about twenty-five pages each. While interesting, the first chapter appears to be too long in relation to the remainder of the book. Second, brackets are used frequently to add information to the text, but the information was evidently not deemed

important enough to appear without brackets. The effect is to confuse the reader. Why is the information in brackets? If one chooses to skip the brackets, when do they end? The brackets have a tendency to break up the text, and therefore the argument.

Despite being aimed at scholars of cultural studies and philosophy, rather than those with a passing interest in Yugoslavia per se, the book does raise interesting points about the aesthetics and ideology of the notion of Yugoslavness in film and television throughout the period of the country's existence. In this respect, I would definitely recommend it to students and as part of any serious course exploring the social demise of Yugoslavia and the idea of a Yugoslav identity.

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