Cinematic Suicide

Introduction

Representations of Working Women in Yugoslav New Film

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Abstract

In this article, I investigate representations of suicide committed by working women in Yugoslav New Film. My research question concerns the reasons why female protagonists, potentially empowered through their involvement in the labour force, are eventually disempowered through their suicide in the 3studied films. Why does the female professional sphere tend to be cinematically portrayed as either a source of peril due to sexual harassment, or a place of the most disappointing experiences? These narratives contradict the socialist discourse of gender equality that encouraged Yugoslav women to seek employment. I look at two case studies from a critical feminist perspective formally analysing them through close reading. Ples v dežju/Dance in the Rain (Boštjan Hladnik, 1961, Yugoslavia) and Bube u glavi/Bats in the Belfry a.k.a. This Crazy World of Ours a.k.a. Bughouse (Miloš 'Miša' Radivojević, 1970, Yugoslavia) both belong to the Yugoslav New Film movement and share a theme of suicide committed by a progressive, working female character, which motivated my choice. The directors render their progressive working heroines vulnerable by transforming the strong women that they are into fragile ones, thus indirectly reflecting male masculinist hostility towards inclusion of women in the workforce. Ultimately, the portrayed suicides of progressive working heroines are a forewarning that a workplace is a dangerous milieu and consequently should be avoided.

Keywords

suicide; Yugoslav New Film; Novi film; socialism; representation; gender; female characters; employment

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Bio
This article focuses on representations of suicide committed by working female protagonists in Yugoslav New Film. The core question tackles the reasons why heroines, who are potentially empowered by labour, are eventually rendered vulnerable to suicide in the case study films. Why is female labour portrayed in films as a source of disappointment and danger which haunts women, especially considering the fact that in Yugoslav socialist society female employment was on the rise? Two Yugoslav New Films, which portray self-harm and violence directed towards emancipated working women are studied. These films are seen as cautionary tales whose moral lesson is that the workplace is a hostile environment and therefore should be avoided. I interpret the cinematic suicides of working women as indirectly reflecting real-life male animosity towards inclusion of women in the workforce.

In addition, I explore the fear of mortality expressed through memento mori symbols, the absence of ageing women's sexuality as if this were exclusively reserved to youth, and the aestheticisation of bodies marked by age. All of this I undertake from a critically feminist perspective, by formal analysis via close readings. This article tackles not only whether the norms of beauty are imposed on represented female characters during their life, but also if they are perpetuated after death.

The Yugoslav New Film movement appeared in 1961 and abruptly came to an end in 1972 (Sudar 2013: 24). Being a loose, modern movement without a manifesto, it is characterised by the auteurism of diverse directors, social critique, freer stance towards sex, and a pessimistic view of life (Petrović 1988: 329-49). Within Yugoslav film production, it coexisted with contemporary mainstream cinema, which retained traditional themes and outlook. Yugoslav New Film – a part of international zeitgeist in film – gathered “filmmakers who practiced the principles of freedom of expression in both form and content” (De Cuir 2016). Genderwise, what Yugoslav New Films have in common is a demeaning attitude towards woman and her body, suggesting that she is a carrier of the societal seed of evil, vice and treachery, and should be punished accordingly; she is a cause or catalyst of a man's downfall; or even when morally virtuous, she is a passive object exposed to violence (Krelja 1979: 409-414). In general, the representations of emancipated women in Yugoslav cinema are infrequent, whereas, on the other hand, the majority of depictions are of physically, psychologically and economically repressed femininity (Daković 1996: 40). There is a tendency to portray a woman either as a myth, or to degrade her, with more frequent inclination towards the latter in the modern Yugoslav New Film (Boglić 1980: 122). Furthermore, as Boglić asserts, “the reality of modern-day Yugoslav working woman does not exist in our films” [“ta stvarnost suvremene jugoslavenske radne žene ne postoje u našim filmovima”] (1980: 125).

Socialist Yugoslavia ratified gender equality by law, which contributed to a significant steady increase in the number of women in the workforce (Ramet 1999: 94-96). In the pre-war Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1940, 17% of women worked legally and contributed to social insurance (Božinović 1996: 230). In comparison, in socialist Yugoslavia in 1969 the employment rate among women had risen to 33.8%, that is, one third of the entire workforce consisted of women (Božinović 1996: 230). However, the remnants of patriarchy lingered and hindered full implementation of gender equality (Slapšak 2001: 231). For instance, in the private sphere women remained sole bearers of household chores and child rearing, thus becoming multiply burdened with employment, expectations of political engagement and the need to be “a desirable sexual object [poželjan seksualni objekt]” (Slapšak 2001: 231). Nevertheless, the ability to work empowered women in terms of financial independence.

As American film and gender scholar Dillman (2014: 14) argues, a source of income gives women agency, but at the expense of friction in the family, marriage and the traditional male gender order. Furthermore, she stresses that the prevalence of deceased women's bodies in the visual sphere symbolizes an embodiment of masculine rage and bitterness at the real-life economic, social and political advancements women have achieved (Dillman 2014: 2). The repercussions of a gender role reversal are best exemplified in Christopher Strong (Dorothy Arzner, 1933, USA) – where a strong and independent woman, who leads an active life and ambitiously pursues a career, is eventually “silenced as speaker of the feminine” through her suicide (Suter 1988: 100). As an argument that these international feminist film theories can be applied to Yugoslav cinema, I employ Johnston’s approach, which states that “[s]exist ideology is no less present in the European art cinema because stereotyping appears less obvious” (2000: 24). In addition, as Daković notes on Yugoslavian cinema: “[T]he emergence of feminist and gender theories has provided an opportunity to apply these concepts to national examples” (1996: 41).
Drawing on the previously mentioned Yugoslav film thinkers and international film feminists, I interpret the suicide of working female characters in two case study films as a refraction of the contradiction in the Yugoslav socialist society, gender-equal by law, yet struggling to eradicate traditional mindset of men towards increasing number of employed women. Therefore, I closely analyse Ples v dežju/Dance in the Rain (Boštjan Hladnik, 1961, Yugoslavia) and Bube u glavi/ Bats in the Belfry a.k.a. This Crazy World of Ours a.k.a. Bughouse\(^2\) (Miloš ‘Miša’ Radivojević, 1970, Yugoslavia), which can both be classified as Yugoslav New Films, selected due to the similarity in theme – a suicide of a progressive, working female protagonist.

### Methods of Suicide

It is less common to find depictions of a woman expressing violence towards a man, but instead, as Schneider points out, “the female protagonist’s violence is ultimately self-directed” (2006: 242). The victimised female character stands for the harm that patriarchal domination has brought upon women (Morrissey 2006: 95). Attempted suicide or suicide is represented as a measure to which female characters resort, predominantly either as a protest against unavoidable subordination to male control or as a response to unreciprocated heterosexual love (Schneider 2006: 243).

Although statistically in reality there are fewer homicides than suicides in the United States, in Hollywood films they are omnipresent, whereas suicides are not (Aaron 2014: 71-72). In real life, in nearly all the countries in the world, women are less prone to suicide than men (Stack and Bowman 2017: 17). Also, in reality females may tend to select suicide methods that will not inflict disfiguring wounds and mar their physical beauty because even in demise they wish to retain their appeal, since “women learn to value physical attractiveness more than men” (Stack and Bowman 2009: 57). Correspondingly, owing to cinema's aestheticization of female self-killing, there is a tendency in film representations to “render suicide painless or invisible but similarly anti-abject” (Aaron 2014: 75).

Another reason why in real life women could be inclined to opt for less mutilating methods - which create an illusion of just sleeping and enable a “neat death” with intact body – would be in order to lessen the shock of the persons who may discover them after expiry (Denning et al. 2000: 286). In that regard, there is “gendering of suicide method in the United States” (Stack and Bowman 2017: 20). Men who kill themselves have a higher tendency to use more violent, immediately lethal methods, such as firearms, cutting and hanging/suffocation, as opposed to women, who usually choose less violent methods, such as pills overdose, drowning, or carbon monoxide poisoning, whereas their intent to die is similar (Denning et al. 2000: 282-284).

If Yugoslav Cinema of the researched period is examined for this theory, which argues that women use less immediately fatal methods of suicide, the investigated films do not reflect real life because the depicted female characters utilise both types of methods. Furthermore, I contend that regardless of which methods are depicted, whether they are perceived as ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’, that is, if they are neater or more disfiguring, their representations in Yugoslav cinema are similarly aestheticized. From 1961 until 1972, 286 films were directed by domestic directors in Yugoslavia, including both Yugoslav New Films (formally and thematically modern) and their mainstream traditional counterparts. From my viewing of 269 films, out of which an estimated 15 films feature implicit or explicit suicide or attempted suicide where the method is known, I found a variety of methods, most of which were potentially disfiguring. In one example a gun is used (Dve noći u jednom danu/Two nights in One Day, Radenko Ostojić, 1963, Yugoslavia). Moreover, in four cases suicide is undertaken by hanging: Balada o svirepom/The Ballad of the Cruel One (Radivoje ‘Lola’ Dukić, 1971, Yugoslavia), Uloga moje porodice u svjetskoj revoluciji/The Role of my Family in World Revolution (Bahrudin ‘Bato’ Ćengić, 1971, Yugoslavia), Deveto čudo na istoku/Ninth Wonder in the East (Vlatko Filipović, 1972, Yugoslavia), and Bube u glavi. In five films women throw or intend to throw themselves: either off a cliff in Peščeni grad/Sand Castle (Boštjan Hladnik, 1962, Yugoslavia) and Deca vojvode Šmita/Children of Duke Schmidt (Vladimir Pavlović, 1967, Yugoslavia), or high building – Gorke trave a.k.a. Die Zeugin aus der Hölle/Witness out of Hell (Živorad ‘Žika’ Mitrović, 1966, Yugoslavia/Germany), or in front of a car – Štićenik/The Protégé a.k.a. The Climber (Vladan Slijepčević, 1966, Yugoslavia), or down stairs – Putovanje na mjesto nesreće/The Scene of the Crash (Zvonimir Berković, 1971, Yugoslavia). Besides, in two films self-killing is done by drowning: Sirota Marija/Poor Maria (Dragoslav Lazić, 1968, Yugoslavia) and Maja strana svijeta/My Part of the World (Vlatko Filipović, 1969, Yugoslavia), in one by setting a house on fire (Pohod/The Trek a.k.a. Expedition, Đorđe Kadijević, 1968, Yugoslavia) and in one a female character resorts to drinking poison – Ples v dežju. In one film – Babije ljeto/Indian Summer (Nikola Tanhofer, 1970, Yugoslavia) suicide is attempted by slitting wrists. Therefore, the methods of cinematic suicides in Yugoslav film do not seem to correspond to the preferred less violent methods from real life female suicides in the United States. Hollywood films don't reflect the reality of suicide in the United

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\(^2\)Miloš ‘Miša’ Radivojević, 1970, Yugoslavia
States, and this unrealistic representation transfers over to Yugoslav film. Regardless of whether a method was violent and would expected to cause visible damage on human body, or if it was non-disfiguring, such as poisoning, in all the studied films no mutilation of a female figure was shown. Based on this, I argue that no matter which method of self-killing – violent or less violent – female characters utilised, their suicide was represented in rather sanitised manner during researched time span of Yugoslav film. Women are expected to look beautiful, both in life and death. This obsession with outer values as societal norm is visible in their non-decayed corpses, but also is highlighted in quotidian lives.

Suicide of Working Women

What do Ples v dežju and Bube u glavi have in common – one being the harbinger of the Yugoslav New Film movement and the other one made towards the end of the movement that abruptly finished in 1972 – besides having a non-linear structure and both being edited by Kleopatra Harisijadis? They both feature suicides of progressive working women. Positive images of working women became very rare during this period.

Bube u glavi foregrounds a gang rape of a working girl Vera (Milja Vujanović), who works as an apprentice. With promises of full-time employment after her forthcoming graduation from university, she is lured by her superior into an event in the woods that is supposed to be a business gathering with her senior working colleagues. Vera and most likely her boyfriend Dragan (Dragan Nikolić) as well, who happened to encounter them by chance, are both raped. In the aftermath and as consequence of the rapes, they are both institutionalised in a psychiatric hospital, but their involuntary stay at the asylum is depicted in the opening of the film and then intertwined with retrospective scenes.

Horeck points out “how cultural ideas about rape and sexualized violence are used to voice public fantasies about masculinity and femininity and the positions that men and women should take in regard to the body politic” (2004: 13). Having this in mind, it is perplexing whether Bube u glavi’s message is intended to discourage women from working by placing them in a position of victim or to warn them about the potential dangers an employed woman might encounter. “The closer women come to claiming their rights and achieving independence in real life, the more loudly and stridently films tell us it’s a man’s world” (Haskell 1987: 363).

Similarly, in Ples v dežju the main heroine Maruša (Duša Počkaj) experiences professional disappointment. Being an ageing actress in early mid-life crisis, she commits suicide after experiencing blows in both personal and professional spheres. Unfortunate events start unfolding when, on her way to a rehearsal, she finds out from a theatre guard that the director of the play wants to talk to her. She meets the director on stage. Their encounter is framed in an extreme long shot, from an overhead perspective. He chastises her for coming too late for the rehearsal, which is already finished. Maruša apologizes, trying to excuse herself in an unconvincing manner. Then they are shown in a two-shot, full shot where he replies that he does not care about her reasons and fires her with the words that they do not need her in the theatre anymore, which he insistently repeats. Suddenly, there is a cut onto an extreme long shot from high angle, perhaps filmed from the theatre balcony and encompassing some spectators. Unexpectedly, Maruša’s behaviour changes from defence to offence as she yells at the director that he is a third-rate former actor, an upstart, a hypocritical brownnoser to whom nothing is sacred, while she sacrificed everything for this theatre. Subsequently, he and Maruša are captured from normal perspective in an extreme long shot in the background, whereas a female spectator is in the blurry foreground, filmed over the shoulder. Maruša continues to verbally confront the director, illuminated with a stage reflector. It is not clear whether this is a figment of her imagination, or if she really has stood up to him. As the insensitive director leaves, Maruša throws at him the words that he could live a thousand years and still be unable to give to this theatre a third of what a lowest actor can give to it, or the last extra. All of a sudden, applause is heard. Broken down and with her feistiness gone, she sits on a piece of scenery, while the camera dollies in from medium long shot to medium close up.

An extreme high angle shot from an aerial perspective concludes the scene as she leaves despondently. Based on Maruša’s tone of voice that abruptly changes in this scene from insecure to assertive, the framing which also alters, unexpectedly including the theatre audience, and their applause (the biggest reward for every theatre actor), this is perhaps her imagination instead of actual confrontation with the director. In reality, Maruša probably does not reply in such a manner when fired, but rather stays quiet, while this scene of the film represents what she would have wanted to say to him.

Having in mind Chivers’ argument that women face ageist bias at a younger age than men, since they stop being
cast for romantic roles with men of their generation by the time they reach forty at the latest and are less likely to get hired past a certain age (Chivers 2017: 68-71), the firing of Maruša could also be interpreted as showing the expendability of an ageing female actress. Director Hladnik placed the empathy of the viewers, (both within the film and the real-life ones) with Maruša as opposed to the insensitive theatre director. However, it remains ambiguous whether Hladnik was critical about her firing in order to underscore a plot point as one of the motives for suicide, or he indeed wanted to imply that not just Maruša's absence from the rehearsals but also aging was a factor in her dismissal.

As noted by Jovanović (2015: 43), during Yugoslav Classical Cinema (1947-1962) a trend started where romance replaced labour in representations of women and in my view continued into the next phase – Yugoslav New Film and its contemporary mainstream cinema. On those occasions when women are represented as working, their professional interests are secondary to the narrative. Employment is sometimes depicted as a factor that destabilizes marriage or relationships, such as in Sudar na paralelama/Collision on the Parallels (Jože Babić, 1961, Yugoslavia), where a husband is jealous over his spouse's business trip with her male boss, so he follows them, or in Ljubavni slučaj ili tragedija službenice PTT/Love Affair or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator (Dušan Makavejev, 1967, Yugoslavia), where a heroine cheats on her partner at her workplace during her shift. Furthermore, the competence of a female architect is unjustly put under question by the locals of a town in Prvi gradanin male varoši/The First Citizen of a Small Town (Mladomir 'Puriša' Dorđević, 1961, Yugoslavia), due to rumours of her romantic involvement with the chairman of that municipality, who approves her project. Depictions of the workplace as an ominous environment, where many dangers lurk, appear in several films. For instance, in Krst Rakoc (Živo ‘Zika’ Ristić, 1962, Yugoslavia) a worker tries to rape a woman who is employed as a cook on secluded work site where they are stationed. Likewise, in Žgodka ki je ni/A Non-Existent Story a.k.a. On the Run (Matjaž Klopčič, 1967, Yugoslavia), a nurse who pays a professional visit to an ill patient in his home is raped by his friend. Similarly, in the film Povratak/The Return (Živojin ‘Zika’ Pavlović, 1966, Yugoslavia) a waitress is gang raped after work by one of her customers and his friends, whereas in Horoskop/Horoscope (Boro Drašković, 1969, Yugoslavia) a woman is raped by indolent young customers of the newspaper kiosk where she works. Moreover, in Ćovek nije tica/Mon is Not a Bird (Dušan Makavejev, 1965, Yugoslavia) a bar singer is stabbed during her performance in a kafana. When a heroine in Rani radovi/Early Works (Želimir Žilnik, 1969, Yugoslavia) briefly undertakes strenuous work in a factory, she faints as a result, and labour is thus rendered hazardous. In Doručak sa dovolum/Breakfast With the Devil (Miroslav ‘Mika’ Antić, 1971, Yugoslavia) a woman who implements agrarian reforms in the countryside is accidentally blown up by a land mine together with her lover. Regardless of the actual function of symbolic or physical violence directed at working heroines in the narrative, in some Yugoslav films of the research period there is an underlying tendency to represent the workplace as something negative and woman's emancipation through work as something that ends fatally or brings misfortune. In contrast, in Yugoslav society annual growth rates of female employment were on the increase and especially high from 1952 until 1965 (Ramet 1999: 96). In 1969 at the Ninth Party Congress Tito also mentioned “the steadily increasing employment of women in the social and economic sectors” (Ramet 1999: 100). Thus, patriarchy strikes back in cinematic depictions, and the situation is similar to that which Dillman observed in American films: “It makes sense to see these images as an inverse index of women's actual gains” (2014: 19).

As Đurović points out, a conservative discourse where female emancipation is subordinated to love in cinematic representation can be detected in Ćudna devojka/Strange Girl (Jovan Živanović, 1962, Yugoslavia) (2018: 10), which belongs to my researched period. Indeed, portrayals of women's competence and female employment as a positive matter, motivated by factors other than love, are sporadic during Yugoslav New Film and its mainstream counterpart. One of the rare exemplary films that value women's work is the mainstream Nizvodno od sunca/Downstream From the Sun (Fedor Škubonja, 1969, Yugoslavia), about a female school teacher who goes to teach children in the countryside. The script was written by a woman, which was uncommon because only seven women were sole scriptwriters out of 286 films directed by domestic directors from 1961 until 1972 (in eight more films they were co-writers with men). The under-representation of women among screenwriters in the researched period no doubt explains the glaring absence of positive depictions of women at work. To further reinforce the point, it should be noted that in all the films mentioned in this article the directors were male.

Memento Mori

At beginning of Radivojević's Bube u glavi, Vera (who was gang raped during a business excursion, as flashbacks will show later in the plot), a patient institutionalized in a mental asylum, is sexually abused by a person in position of power – a doctor psychologist. The doctor gropes her breast as he examines her chest with a stethoscope. The
abuse of power on multiple levels – by work colleagues and a healthcare provider – indicates what Balsom labels as “pervasiveness of misogyny” (2017: 33). Exploitation of the patient continues, as seen on a monitor screen where the macabre X-rays are shown in motion – of the bones of doctor’s hand with wedding ring touching Vera’s facial bones, as well as his skull kissing her skull.

As the consequence of the second, implied rape by the doctor, the traumatized, incommunicable and despondent Vera, who was already in a fragile state of mind when admitted to the hospital after the first, gang rape, commits suicide. Vera’s self-killing is amongst macabre elements indicative of director Radivojević’s interest in the transience of life, such as moving human X-rays, reminiscent of memento mori, and an excerpt of Tolstoy’s book that deals with ephemeralness, which in one scene Dragan reads to Vera aloud: “What is death and how to save oneself?” Memento mori is a Latin term meaning “remember you will die” (Duclow 2003: 568), inferring the acceptance of fleetingness of human existence. This reminder of our own mortality was depicted via certain symbols through history and art, for example the hourglass, skull and bones (Duclow 2003: 568). Besides the above-mentioned X-rays of skulls, Dragan finds a human skull on the ground during his stroll at the graveyard. He addresses it, whilst pushing it with his foot: “Yorick, I have nothing to say to you”, alluding to Shakespeare’s Hamlet. Moreover, there is a human skeleton model exhibited in Dragan’s painting class. In my view, other memento mori symbols are: a dead white butterfly, carried away by ants, and a collection of pinned insects, examined by Dragan through a magnifying glass, which he then points at Vera, as if foreshadowing her destiny, not much different from the insects’ (Figure 1).

She is pinned down during the gang rape and during the implicit rape by the psychiatrist as well, consequentially followed by her suicide.

The film Ples v dežju also features several death motifs that are interwoven in the narrative. When Maruša comes to her apartment moments before committing suicide, she reads a theatre play next to a doll, perhaps signifying her powerlessness as a puppet due to being fired. The doll motif recurs when Maruša’s partner Peter (Miha Baloh) enters an abandoned, dilapidated apartment, where he finds a razor blade resting on top of a doll. A razor blade is a recurring motif in the film, signifying imminent peril, menace and death. It also features as a threat in a scene when Peter is getting shaved at the barber’s. In addition, in a morning scene when Maruša is awakened in Peter’s apartment by his landlord Anton, for an instant he appears to want to kill her with a razor blade. Furthermore, another memento mori symbol emerges during the painting class that Peter teaches. When the camera dollies forward over elementary school children to a medium close-up shot of a little girl who is posing for them, the word “death” from an alphabet jigsaw is visible in the blurry background. Besides, during a dream Peter has, he is surrounded by numerous funeral caskets. Also, in Anton’s room is a clock with two skeletons on it hanging on a wall, suggesting the passage of time and the ephemeralness of human beings. Similar to Dragan in the painting classroom, Maruša passes by two human skeleton props on the way to meet the theatre director on the stage, where she will get fired as expendable. Therefore, the objects such as the clock, skull and human skeleton are memento mori symbols of Vera’s and Maruša’s demises, but also death in general and corporeal evanescence. “The fear of old age is very present in our society” (Adelseck 2017: 43), which can be inferred by the presence of these items and themes that address ageing and mortality.
Standards of beauty in life

The omnipresent societal fear of ageing is a cultural construction that goes hand in hand with “the commodification of women’s bodies” (McGlynn, O’Neill, and Schrage-Früh 2017: 5). Whereas Vera is treated as an object due to her attractive young body and suffers rape on two occasions, the pressure on Maruša to look young and beautiful takes its toll in an early mid-life crisis, thus underscoring the problematic standards of beauty imposed on both youthful and ageing women.

Evidence of the frustrating expectations of beauty, imbued even into the subconscious, is Maruša’s oneric escapism to a place where she grew up in the picturesque countryside. In her dream sequence, a wagon drawn by a white horse approaches Maruša. She hops on it, next to the wagoner, and tells him her intention to return home, maybe for good, due to feeling tired and a bit ill. The wagoner recognizes her because in their village and all the villages in the valley there had been no redheads except for Maruša. He had seen her in the paper, in a full-page colour photo, below which it read: “A great actress, young and beautiful.” The wagoner’s statement is an example of what Chivers described as “the gendered double standards that govern film representations of aging” (Chivers 2017: 70). Regardless of the fact that the focus is on the youth and physical appeal of the actress instead of the quality of performance, his words soothe Maruša’s ego. So, she utters in internal monologue about herself: “It must be true since the driver knows that I am an actress, do you hear this Peter? A successful actress with a great future.”

Maruša gets off. It is revealed that there is a young romantic couple sitting on the very back of the horse drawn wagon, recurring as a leitmotif in eleven different situations throughout the narrative, as a counterpoint to Maruša’s and other characters’ disappointment in love. Perhaps they symbolise the innocent, pure and idealised love that all the characters strive for, and which evades all of them. Despite the fact that the dream sequence mostly concerns Maruša’s profession instead of love, it is not devoid of Peter’s presence since she mentioned him in her internal monologue. Hence, she is not represented as an independent career woman, who does her job in order to fulfil herself, but as somebody constantly seeking her partner’s approval, even in the professional sphere. Maruša’s dream is a subliminal indicator of her fear of ageing, loss of youth and attractiveness.

Another situation when norms of youthful beauty torment Maruša are within her oneric fantasy at the dressmaker’s. After trying out a fancy dress there in front of multiple mirrors, she goes out on the street, elegantly dressed up and with a ladylike hairstyle. A girl from the dressmaker’s shop invites her colleagues to come and see the young and beautiful Maruša, so they lean out of the window in order to have a better view of her. A non-diegetic instrumental tune starts. Two elderly women on the street bow to her. Then, she passes by the young romantic couple, recurring the eighth time out of eleven, and looks at them while they are kissing. While Maruša walks in a circle, the camera tracks her movement. The oneric sequence eventually finishes in a similar way to how it started. At its beginning, a little girl is shown turning around her axis, with her skirt fluttering around her, followed by a matching cut on a similar action of dressed-up Maruša in front of mirrors at the dressmakers. When, later, the little girl makes the same action, it signals the end of the daydream sequence. In addition, before the fantasy begins the light changes as sunshine suddenly illuminates Maruša – dressed in normal clothing and with common hairstyle – hinting that the imaginary, elegantly dressed version of her is soon to follow. Hladnik seamlessly performs transitions between real and oneric, showing impressive mastery. At the very end of the fantasy sequence in a close-up, the actual Maruša is shown again, snapped out of her dream-like state when sunshine suddenly disappears and the prompt’s off-voice is heard. The prompt is Maruša’s colleague from the theatre, whose job is to feed actors their lines if they forget them on stage. When off from work, he courts Maruša or follows her around due to being infatuated with her. The juxtaposition between Maruša’s genuine self and her fictional self, created as a figment of imagination due to wanting to be pretty, highlights the discrepancy between them, caused by problematic aesthetic expectations.

Another example when unacceptable societal standards of beauty and youthfulness are imposed on a female character is the motif of ageing hands. After being fired at work, Maruša, who sits alone in the restaurant, puts unrealistic expectations on her fallible partner that he will comfort her. Via her internal monologue, the viewer hears that Peter will come, help her and resolve everything. When Peter eventually comes to the restaurant, he starts rudely and meanly, offending Maruša, whereas she doesn’t even manage to tell him that she has lost her job at the theatre, nor speak at all, due to his lengthy insulting rant: “You keep brooding, you are like the Sleeping Beauty with her charmed face and waxen hands. Ugly hands, I hate them.” Throughout his demeaning external monologue, which continues endlessly, Maruša’s face is merely shown at its very beginning, for a brief instant when Peter arrives. The camera then tracks forward from two-shot onto Peter’s medium close-up, after which point he is the focus of the scene. When he degradingly talks about her hands, the camera pans from his face onto
them, illustrative of Krainitzki’s observation how female hands connote ‘stigmata’ of growing old (2016: 169). In my view, they are a pair of normal female hands, which is in accordance with Bogojević’s statement that “men project the most vivid experiences of ageing and decay onto the female body” (2013: 248). Peter himself is entering a midlife crisis, which can perhaps be inferred from his dream with numerous coffins that suggests thoughts about mortality, and also from his dissatisfaction with the work as a painting teacher, expressed to Maruša at the commencement of his monologue. However, his own physical ageing and decaying is never brought under question.

Besides, Peter asserts that there has never been a trace of love between them, but only loathing and pain from the very beginning. “You’re getting wrinkled, old and repulsive, even as a mistress”, he continues while touching a ripped and worn-out tablecloth, as if he wants to draw a parallel between Maruša’s face, which is not shown, and the old tablecloth. He suggests that they put an end to their relationship. Although Maruša and Peter are probably of similar age, he is hypocritical about hers, which is in line with Bogojević’s (2013: 246) statement that male ageing is never addressed as an issue, whereas women’s early midlife is perceived as something negative and equated with old age.

The motif of ageing hands appears for the second time in the film in the same restaurant, but after an ellipsis, undertook by intercutting two scenes (the prompt’s oneiric scene at Maruša’s imaginary apartment and of his reality outdoors in the rain). An overhead shot encompasses Peter, who is sitting alone, next to an empty chair. Self-absorbed, he does not even notice that Maruša has left, under the pretext that he dares not to look at her out of shame. He tries to soften his previous insults about her, for instance by stating that although her skin isn’t very nice, it is still soft and smooth, whilst touching the table cloth again, but this time on the spot which is not ripped. Eventually, after a lengthy rant Peter says that he loves her immensely. At that point, he finally realizes that Maruša is gone. Considering that his monologue was very long, during which he hasn’t noticed her absence, this sequence is perhaps not convincingly directed. Peter abandons his dreams about a fantasy woman, whereas Maruša, contrary to him, escapes from the reality and embraces imagination through suicide.

The third time the motif of ageing hands appears in the film is when Maruša, after leaving the restaurant unbeknownst to Peter, is at home. She says in inner monologue that it is all over for her and crumples up the play script, realising that her career as an actress is finished. Then, Maruša lays it aside, distracted with her own hands. While looking at them, she recalls Peter’s insults: that her face is too broad, eyes too large, skin neglected, and her hands ugly and plain as if they weren’t a woman’s hands. This is in line with Krainitzki’s observation that “ageing hands are seen as abject in a youth-oriented society” (2016: 169). Maruša recounts the culmination of Peter’s verbal abuse that she is “old, repulsive, even as a mistress”, and wonders if all he said was true. Thus, on Maruša’s impending death can be applied what Kaplan asserted for a female character that allows “the patriarchal definition of herself as worthless to become her own definition of herself, not having any other discourse within which to evaluate herself differently” (1990: 47). By accepting imposed societal norms of youthfulness and beauty, Maruša succumbs to the consumerist image of herself, discrepant to her real self. Unable to meet those unrealistic expectations, she ends her life.

As opposed to Ples v dežju, Bube u glavi breaks a societal taboo on, as Liddy notes, “[t]he display of the ageing female body” (2017: 177). During Dragan’s painting class at the art academy he attends, there is a posing group, consisted of four nude models. Director Radivojević depicts a nude young male model in a long shot in the background within the group composition, whereas his penis is hidden by a head of an older female model who is in the foreground. On the other hand, by tilting and panning in close-ups, the camera scrutinizes the details of the bodies of an androgynous person and two older female models. According to Russo (1994: 56), the irregular body and the ageing body are amongst female bodies perceived as grotesque. In a similar vein, Liddy (2017: 172) stresses that the sight of the menopausal ageing female body often provokes an impression of decline and disgust. Therefore, the insistence of the director on the unembellished close-up details of ageing women, such as sagging breasts, renders their old bodies abject, whereas the male model is not old nor subjected to such visual dissection in close-up details. Nevertheless, we may note that Dragan is seen kissing the hand of one of the old ladies. Perhaps director Đorđević’s intention was not to debase ageing female characters, but to underscore the message of the transience of life. Signs of ageing are a reminder of mortality (Adelseck 2017: 44). Notwithstanding, the represented women do not have their male ageing counterpart, who would be put under the spotlight and scrutinized like them, so the director used their bodies for his own means.

Regardless of whether concerning ageing yet still attractive bodies, such as Maruša’s, young bodies as Vera’s, or old bodies as of the painting models, they are all examples of “social standards and expectations of beauty and sexuality in a culture of anti-ageing” (McGlynn, O’Neill, and Schrage-Früh 2017: 12). The norms of appealing
youthful physical appearance provoke immense pressure in women, face them with unrealistic aesthetical expectations, commodify and objectify them.

in the gang rape scene. The insistent voyeuristic gaze directed at Vera's breasts could be explained by Coupland's (2013: 7) theory on the 'look of youth', which is related to the ability of young bodies to magnetically captivate admiring gaze, whereas the 'look of ageing' is linked with a propensity of old physiques to repulse it.

Similarly, in Ples v dežju, a young girl, Magda, is constantly subjected to the Mulveyan “male gaze” (1989: 19) and thus objectified. She goes to the apartment of the male main character Peter and undresses in a manner reminiscent of strip-tease, underscored with non-diegetic modern jazz music, thus appearing only in one sequence as an unimportant, episodic character in the service of visual pleasure. Also, Magda's personhood is dehumanised because her face is shown only briefly before she takes off her shirt, and even then she is beyond recognition, concealed with a shadow. In addition, in spite of being mostly shot from the back, her body is highly eroticised while she slowly unbuttons her black bra, and its voluptuousness is emphasised during the approach to the bed in which Peter lies. Hence, Magda is represented as a sexualised figure, not as a person. The sex between her and Peter is implied. After the sexual exploit, he verbally humiliates her to get her things and leave. With this behaviour, Peter expresses signs of misogyny. Magda states she will never come again, calls him an animal and departs. Although her face is finally fully shown for the first time while she is getting dressed to go in the aftermath of the intercourse, his denigrating treatment and insulting tone further depersonalise her. Thereafter, she disappears from the plot without a proper closure.
asleep and has his back turned to her. The eradication of all sexual activity from portrayals of older women naturalizes the invisibility of their sexuality that, as a consequence, becomes abject (Liddy 2017: 170). Maruša, therefore, fits into hegemonic representation of female ageing in film, described by Krainitzki as “the image of the asexual older woman” (2016: 162). The absence of sexual intercourse between the couple is diametrically opposite to the animalistic and carnal implicit fornication of Peter with Magda, who is younger than him.

Although both scenes with women take place in the same room, the atmosphere is completely different, not only because of the visual presence of passion in one scene and lack of it in the other one, but also due to auditive cues. Sonic sexual stimulus is expressed through non-diegetic jazz music, which accompanies Magda’s sensual removal of her black lace bra, remaining only in panties while shot from the back, whereas unstimulating howling of dogs underscores Maruša’s mechanical disrobing into her virginally chaste white slip that covers more than it reveals. Contrary to Maruša’s decorum, Magda’s fleshliness is not surprising because, according to Liddy’s observation, “younger female characters routinely appear in various stages of undress” (2017: 169).

Similarly, in Bube u glavi there are no depictions of ageing people’s sexual acts, which corresponds to Liddy’s findings that “[s]exually active older female characters have traditionally been absent from cinema” (2017: 167). Needless to say, sex is only represented between young people, whereas old people are asexual. However, youthful carefree sex is overshadowed by the sexual violence that Vera and her boyfriend Dragan are exposed to by witnessing each other’s rapes.

When Vera is raped by one of her co-workers, while the other one restrains her, there is a medium shot in slow-motion, where she is shown laid horizontally on the ground burdened by the body of the rapist, with a stereotypically barren breast and an agonizing expression on her face. Later in the fabula, in a similarly framed shot with correspondingly positioned bodies (heads on the right side of the frame, waists cut with the left edge of the frame), but with the difference that it is tinted red, Vera and Dragan are depicted while having passionate sex. The fact that the composition of shot of the lovemaking reminisces the composition of shot in the above-mentioned instance during rape, also in slow motion, enhances the contrast between love and sexual violence.

Portrayals of youthful active sexuality testify how depictions of love, such as when Vera makes love with Dragan, are eclipsed with the sexual violence of rapes in Vera’s case, and in that of Magda’s dehumanizing sexual act with Peter. Furthermore, Maruša’s absence of sexual life, which extends to Yugoslav New Film in general in regards to older female characters, corresponds to Liddy’s reflection that in US, British and Irish fiction films depictions of mature female sexuality are very rare (2017: 169). Often there isn’t any sex for older women in Yugoslav New Film, whereas young girls are denigrated in sexual experiences or subjected to sexual violence such as rape.

Expectations of beauty in death and fantasy

Ironically, Maruša’s body is the most revered, plus has more physical contact in fantasy and death than in real life. During Peter’s previously mentioned long misogynistic rant in the restaurant, only he was in the spotlight. When Maruša is finally shown in a medium close-up shot, her clothing and hairstyle are altered as compared to the very beginning of the restaurant sequence. The camera dollies back and pans on the prompt, revealing that Maruša is with him in a completely different space instead of with Peter in the restaurant. The room in question is big and opulent. The prompt looks at a huge portrait painting on which Maruša is depicted, wearing the dress she had worn in her imaginary sequence at the dressmaker’s. Then, he sits on some pillows on the floor, next to her, leaning on her leg, while she lies prostrate on a sofa. Maruša pats him on the head like a child. He declares love to her in a close-up, while baring her thigh, kissing it salaciously and caressing it with his hand. Subsequently, the prompt touches her hair, stating he has always liked it. He stresses his desire to always be with Maruša. She responds in an extreme close-up that perhaps he is the only man who really loves her. There is a cut to the close-up of him in the rain in exterior, which clarifies that this was his fantasy. There is a discrepancy between the prompt’s expectations depicted in this imaginary scene and the actual visit to Maruša’s place in his reality, shown later in the film.

During the prompt’s actual visit, Maruša’s apartment looks completely different, especially in that it is shabbier and smaller. The prompt pleads with off-screen Maruša to stay where she is, not to look at him nor say anything. Throughout this scene, Maruša’s face is not shown until the very end. The prompt has come to say goodbye to her before going to hospital due to his poor health. Like in his oneiric scene, he stands next to Maruša’s huge portrait on the wall, but this time it is a less glamorous photograph as opposed to the painting from his fantasy. Then,
whilst she is seated in an armchair, he touches her hair, lies on the floor and leans his head onto her feet in high heeled shoes. While at her feet, the prompt declares love to the immobile Maruša. He sucks her motionless right-hand fingers, which will invoke a fetishist connotation once it is revealed at the end of the scene that he was, at this point, unknowingly caressing someone who is already dead. Then, the prompt promises to come back and stands up. When he goes out and closes the door, the camera tracks rightwards on Maruša's close-up, where she is shown with eyes wide open, staring without blinking. There is a lighting change, and everything becomes dark except for one part of her hair which is lit. Some knocking is heard, which serves as a cue for camera to track leftwards, focusing on the door. Peter enters, turns on the light and goes off-screen next to her. He screams her name in off-voice, realising that Maruša is dead.

In line with “dominant narratives that represent ageing purely as decline” (Jennings and Grist 2017: 204), Maruša takes her own life at home, as shown in a retrospective scene, after admitting to herself that she cannot pretend misfortunate incidents with Peter and the theatre director didn’t happen, when they did. Since reality is her enemy, she expresses the need for another reality, her own reality. She takes a small bottle out of a cupboard and declares in internal monologue that she will not allow anyone to steal her world. The camera tracks to the right, leaving her off-screen, when Maruša is shown about to take a sip from the small bottle. During the camera movement, her internal monologue is heard once again, declaring that she will ride across her meadow again. However, when the camera stops, Maruša surprisingly appears in the right-hand part of the room, whereas it is not clear how she traversed it, which suggests that oneiric and real are merging towards her imminent death.

Fig. 3: Boštjan Hladnik, Ples v dežju, 1961.

down, brushes it and remembers the words of the kind wagoner from her fantasy. The redness of her hair that her character is lauded for is unfortunately not visible since the film is black and white.

Maruša steps back until her full figure is visible in the mirror and touches her own body, sliding both hands downwards over her breasts. “It’s not true that I am old and ugly, that’s what only evil people say”, she says as the camera pans leftwards from Maruša in the mirror to the real one, again juxtaposed to her big photograph portrait. “Ageing is tolerated in men, but not in women” (Bogojević 2013: 248), as Maruša’s case clearly exemplifies. In confronting her with her own image in the mirror and in the portrait photograph of her younger self, director Hladnik reinforces this trope, since he does not subject the male lead, Peter, to a similar confrontation.

Next, Maruša pulls down a tablecloth, so little toys that were on it fall off a table. Afterwards, she drags herself into an armchair and, in external monologue expresses her desire for Peter to come although she is “old and plain”. Thus, Maruša’s character clearly reveals the anguish of females caused by aging, impacted by the norms of womanliness, such as beauty and eternal youth, in the early phase of consumerism in Yugoslav society (Jovanović 2014: 31). Also, in my view, at that point Maruša completely abandons her ambitions and perhaps serves as a mouthpiece for the director’s vision of woman, instead of being a fully fleshed out character, when she says her last words: “You’ll love me and stay with me, that is all I desire. All the rest is meaningless. All the rest is nothing.”
and take Maruša away, which is visible in the reflection of the mirror while they pass next to her big photograph in portrait. Then, they carry downstairs the limp body, resembling images of martyrs. The film ends with a corresponding dose of pathos. Peter walks away into the dark night in the street, while the recurring couple, shown in the eleventh and last situation, dances in the rain underscored with its audible pounding and a non-diegetic instrumental lamenting guitar melody, highlighting the romance he will never have, or any of the film’s characters, except the romance with death.

_Ples v dežju_ and _Bube u glavi_ differ because Maruša, whose suicide is explicit, is represented as deprived of sex, whereas Vera is an open-minded, sexually liberated woman, who did not refrain from carnal pleasures with her boyfriend Dragan. As opposed to Maruša’s midlife crisis manifested through a deteriorating relationship and loss of job, which triggered the self-killing, Vera is an example of rape-suicide in Yugoslav New Film. Sexual assault is a known potential cause of real-life suicide in both female and male victims (Stack and Bowman 2009: 63). In painting, the most frequently depicted rape-related female suicide was of Lucretia, which historically took place in 509 B.C. (Stack and Bowman 2009: 63). Whereas Lucretia’s act would be regarded as “heroic suicide” (Stack and Bowman 2009: 65), in _Bube u glavi_ there are no heroics. On the contrary, director Radivojević renders the tragic situation somewhat comical. Vera’s hanging body, shown only from the waist down, is found in the toilet by another patient – an elderly woman. In her own madness, she does not grasp the severity of the situation, but instead ties the shoelaces on Vera’s shoes, without even getting startled by the hung deceased body that sways (Figure 6).
Therefore, Vera's suicide is implicit since the actual action of self-killing is not shown. However, the aftermath of the suicide is portrayed, whereas there is no noticeable disfiguration of the female corpse, regardless of the fact that the method of self-inflicted death is extremely violent and in real life would deface the body. Such representation is anti-abject because there is no depiction of the very moment of demise, not of entire corpse, nor of "decadent display of death for our contemplation, erotic or otherwise" (Aaron 2014: 80). Vera's head, which might show the wounds caused by hanging, is not shown. It confirms what Krysinska notes regarding aestheticized ancient representations of Lucrecia's suicide, conducted by plunging a dagger into her own chest, in the sense that they "hardly ever realistically show the inevitable wounds or blood" (2009: 26). In a similar vein, Maruša looks as if she has just has fallen asleep. In fact, in my view, in all the female suicide films of the researched period, regardless as to whether they are classified as mainstream or Yugoslav New Film, no traces of injuries, marring or mutilation are shown on female bodies. Apparently, there are standards of beauty not only in life, but in representations of death as well.

As Jovanović would have it, Maruša is a "woman-object", who kills herself in order to salvage "her own image of her younger, prettier, and more desirable self" (2014: 30). His interpretation differs from Boglič's, who perceives Maruša as a redeemer of her own liberation by suicide, determined to die in order to "set free the heroine of the Yugoslav Cinema from all subordination" (1980: 124, as cited in Jovanović 2014: 30). In my view, she is a contradiction because of simultaneously being a subject and object. Films can be misogynistic and feministisch at the same time (Dillman 2014, 2-3). Arguments for concurring with Jovanović's opinion I find in the scene when Maruša is in front of the mirror just before her demise, checking out whether she is still beautiful, and her personal and professional debasement throughout the film, with its underlying message discouraging women in general from work. I do not perceive Maruša, as Boglič characterized her, as an uncompromising "contemporary Joan of Arc" (1980: 124, as cited in Jovanović 2014: 30), but similar to Bogojević, as a desperate woman, "whose physical ageing equals her emotional, mental and spiritual decay" (2013: 246). However, in my opinion, although Boglič did not expound it as such, perhaps she interpreted Maruša as a 'positive' image because director Hladnik does not condone Peter's and the theatre director's behaviour that contributed to her death. Furthermore, Hladnik offers Maruša's perspective via internal or external monologue, regardless of how outdated they may appear nowadays. In Yugoslav film, female perspective is seldom shown and he should be commended for providing it. However, Maruša's empowerment by occasionally being enunciator of the narrative is annulled by the suicide.

Conclusion

In films from the researched period (1961-1972) that depict female suicides, their bodies do not show signs of disfigurement. This is seen in films that could be classified as mainstream as well in those of the Yugoslav New Film, and regardless of how violent the method of self-killing is, ranging from gunshot to poison. The societal norms of appealing female appearance affect not only how their lives are represented, but their deaths as well. Perhaps women were expected to be beautiful in life and death. In Bughouse, youthful Vera's character was portrayed by a woman who was in real life selected as Miss Serbia – the most beautiful woman in one of the Yugoslav republics. Although Vera uses a violent method of suicide – hanging – her body is only shown from the waist down, so no death grimace on the face with cyanosis or protruding tongue, which would be expected to appear after such a brutal demise in real life, is shown. Although Maruša belongs to an earlier generation than Vera – early mid-life, her ageing is addressed as a negative factor, which illustrates the pressure on women to always be good-looking. It also underscores how often the female gender is scrutinized based on outer appearance. In the films from the researched period, portrayals of heroines of old age are not very common, unless the focus is on their motherhood.

Both analysed case study films have in common the classification as Yugoslav New Films. Also, they feature modern, working heroines who commit suicide. In these two cases, problems related to women's professional sphere – in Maruša's case being fired and in Vera's being gang raped by colleagues from work – undoubtedly trigger their suicides. These films contradict the Yugoslav socialist discourse of gender equality that encouraged women towards employment and resulted in a steady rise in the number of working women. On the contrary, the films portray the work sphere as either a dangerous place, in which sexual harassment lurks, or as a place that brings grim disappointment.

The films have an underlying message of work as perilous, almost as if it safer for women to stay at home.
this the intention of the two directors? I highly doubt that, but most definitely they were influenced to some extent by an ongoing conflict in Yugoslavian society at that time, during which two diametrically opposite currents were clashing: the socialist tendency to free women from their domestic chains by employment, and the inclination of the remnants of patriarchy, whom the state could not easily repress, to maintain female subordination. So, if women worked, in most cases they had the double burden of household chores as well.

However, the more women started working, the more of them became financially independent, which increased their chances of having some decision making within the family. On the other hand, it seems that the films from the researched period seldom portray women as satisfied working entities. For example, when Maruša is in a bar with the prompt, she is the one who pays the bill for their drinks, which is one of the indicators of her financial independence due to her job in the theatre. Nevertheless, all the positive aspects of her employment are obliterated with the loss of her job, and subsequent suicide. Similarly, Vera is an apprentice in a company, with prospects of being hired full time and a bright future, until a small work-related picnic results in sexual abuse. In their private spheres as well, both heroines are subjected to some form of cruelty by their boyfriends: Vera's slaps her for no obvious reasons, after what she strikes him back, whereas Maruša's expresses extreme verbal cruelty.

Considering that Yugoslav New Film directors were auteurs, bearing the responsibility for their artistic choices, it was Hladnik's directorial intent not to sexually objectify Maruša, contrary to as he did with Magda in the disrobing scene, resembling strip-tease, whose character disappears after serving the purpose of inflaming the (male) viewer's imagination. Still, Hladnik portrays Maruša as (self-) objectified preceding the suicide, when she scrutinises herself in the mirror, while sliding with hands over her own curves. Keeping in mind that acting is not a conventional profession, because an actor's only tool is his or her own body, there is a form of reflexivity at work here, transforming Maruša the actress into the symbol of the societal pressures on a woman's self-image. Thus, Hladnik demonstrates a potential to criticise the deterministic norms of female appearance that the film brings to light and, seemingly, reinforces.

Radivojević as well objectifies Vera by showing her naked bust obsessively multiple times. However, when shown within a playful context where Vera and her boyfriend are depicted as two consensual people who love each other, due to the framing where they are encompassed together, the impression is of equality and not of exploitation. Diametrically opposite is the carnal context and a fetishist manner in which Magda's nude back is isolated as a detail in a close-up and underscored with music as if it were strip-tease number. Ironically, Magda's back feels more nude than Vera's explicitly shown bust during lovemaking. Nevertheless, Vera's denuded breasts in the rape scenes are clearly a flagrant exploitation that obliterates any positive effect of the above-mentioned liberated sexuality. Also, Vera is more a function in the service of director Radivojević, than a full-fledged character like Maruša.

It is important to note that Hladnik and Radivojević are equally critical towards the unjust and deplorable deaths of their heroines. They both offer their perspectives, especially Hladnik. For example, Hladnik gives Maruša's point of view throughout the whole film by making her inner monologue audible, whereas Radivojević portrays Vera's post-rape trauma by showing her as she throws oranges at two nurses in the mental asylum. Unfortunately, the directors ultimately disempower their progressive working heroines by transforming them from strong women into vulnerable, echoing societal masculinist animosity towards women's employment.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my academic advisor Prof. Dr Philippe Meers for his advice and support with my research and this article. In addition, my heartfelt thank you goes to Dr Natascha Drubek, Dr MarioSlugan, Evgenia Trufanova, Vera Vuković, Robert Olbricht, Vojislav Erceg, Aleksandra Stošić, Ryan Pescatore Frisk and Chernelle Lambert-Sebrechts. Lastly, I am greatly indebted to Dr Alex Forbes, whose constructive feedback and proofreading enriched this article.

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Notes

1 Although it is possible the number is higher because there were women who did unreported illegal employment, for instance mostly as maids.

2 Even though the title Bats in the Belfry appears in few rare mentions of the film by other authors, and on IMDb webpage the title of the film is translated as This Crazy World of Ours, the more appropriate translation of the title would be Bughouse. This is because the literal translation to English language of the original title 'Bube u glavi' – which is an idiom for silliness or madness in Serbo-Croatian – would be ‘Bugs in a head’. Also, throughout the film there is a leitmotif of bugs, therefore the title Bughouse retains both the word ‘bug’ and its implied meaning of lunacy, as opposed to the titles Bats in the Belfry and This Crazy World of Ours which lose this original dimension.

3 Together with film Dvoje/The Couple a.k.a. Two a.k.a. And Love Has Vanished (Aleksandar Petrović, 1961, Yugoslavia).

4 The translations of the dialogues are taken from the available film copy by an anonymous translator and used as such with some small amendments.

5 As kindly pointed out to me by Dr Alex Forbes.

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Funding

This work was supported by the University of Antwerp Research Fund [DOCPRO1 BOF] from September 2017 until August 2018, and journal Apparatus that made this publication possible by granting a publication fee waiver.

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Suggested Citation


URL: http://www.apparatusjournal.net/

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