

Vesi Vuković<sup>1</sup>

Voluntary postdoctoral researcher of the  
Visual and Digital Cultures Research Centre (ViDi)  
at University of Antwerp

791.633-051 Макавејев Д.  
791.633-051 Имamura Ш.  
COBISS.SR-ID 120076809

## HUMAN AS ANIMAL: THE FILMS OF DUŠAN MAKAVEJEV AND SHOHEI IMAMURA

### **Abstract**

*The aim of this paper is to investigate auteur opuses of directors Shohei Imamura and Dušan Makavejev, namely how they represented femininities and masculinities, their sexualities, and the roles of women and men in changing societies. The two directors had several traits in common: both were impacted by the films of Japanese director Akira Kurosawa; both created fiction films as well as documentary films, and occasionally hybrids of both genres; both directors expressed political critique in their films, and challenged social and sexual taboos; both had quirky instances in their films, i.e. women breastfeeding adult men (Imamura in *Insect Woman* and Makavejev in *Sweet Movie*); and both directors had a caustic sense of humour that imbued their films. Another prominent characteristic of Imamura's and Makavejev's work is that throughout their oeuvres there is a persistent recurrence of (wo)man-as-an-animal metaphor. More particularly, some of their films take a cinematic zoomorphic stance by juxtaposing the animal and the human, and by blurring the human-animal boundary. This paper focuses on the zoomorphic representations via close reading of their films.*

### **Keywords**

*Dušan Makavejev, Shohei Imamura, Yugoslav New Film, Japanese Nuberu Bagu, Human as Animal*

### **Acknowledgments**

My wholehearted “Thank you!” goes to Dr Nevena Daković, Dr Ksenija Radulović, Vera Vuković, Simo Vuković and Agis Olbricht.

<sup>1</sup> vesi.vukovic@gmail.com

Usually in film studies literature a parallel is drawn between director Dušan Makavejev, namely part of his film opus belonging to *Yugoslav New Film* and *Yugoslav Black Wave*, and Jean-Luc Godard, namely part of his opus belonging to *Nouvelle Vague/French New Wave*. However, I will make a different kind of comparison, in my view more suitable, between Dušan Makavejev and Shohei Imamura, renowned *Japanese New Wave/Nūberu bāgu* director.

*Jugoslovenski novi film/Yugoslav New Film* is a term for Yugoslavian Cinema Movement from the early 1960s until the early 1970s (roughly from 1961 until 1972), while *Jugoslovenski Crni talas* a.k.a. *Crni val/Yugoslav Black Wave* is a subset of *Yugoslav New Film*, comprising the most politically provocative films. Notable *Yugoslav New Film* directors were, for example, Živojin Pavlović, Aleksandar Saša Petrović, Želimir Žilnik, Mika Antić, Mića Popović, Bata Čengić, Marko Babac, Krsto Papić, Boro Drašković, and Dušan Makavejev – whose style I will closely investigate. *Yugoslav New Film* was marked by non-traditional approach to filmmaking, such as location shooting, loose plots, anti-heroes, abundant camera movements or hand-held camera, montage of attractions provoking emotional shock, nudity contents and free stance towards sexuality, and juxtaposition of documentary and fictional material. Similarly, *Japanese New Wave/Nūberu bāgu* is a term for Japanese Cinema movement “defined as films produced and/or released in the wake of [Nagisa] Oshima’s *A Town of Love and Hope* [愛と希望の街/*Ai to kibō no machi*, 1959], films which take an overtly political stance in a general way or toward a specific issue, utilizing a deliberately disjunctive form compared to previous filmic norms in Japan” (Desser 1988: 4). According to Coleman and Desser, the year 1960 marks the beginning of the *Japanese New Wave*, because during that year many films were released, films which were directed by young directors (from Shochiku studio and, in the later years, from others e.g. Nikkatsu studio), such as Nagisa Oshima, Masahiro Shinoda, and Yoshishige (Kiju) Yoshida, “clearly pushing the boundaries of film style and social commentary” (Coleman & Desser 2019: 4). Renowned directors also included Suzuki Seijun, Hiroshi Teshigahara, Koji Wakamatsu, Susumu Hani, and Shohei Imamura – who will be the centrepiece of this article. *Japanese New Wave* stretched throughout the 1970s. Similar to *Yugoslav New Film*, it explored a number of neglected ideas in cinema often making social outcasts the protagonists and utilizing film to criticize social structures and political situation.

The main focus of this article is dissecting the auteur oeuvres of the movements’ directors Shohei Imamura and Dušan Makavejev, especially in terms of how they captured femininities and masculinities, their sexualities, and the roles of women and men in changing societies. According to Daković, Makavejev

“violated social myths and taboos” (Daković 2014: 83), which was, in my view, also an important trait of Imamura’s work. Furthermore, both directors were influenced by the works of Japanese director Akira Kurosawa (see Ilić 2008: 52–58, Richie 2005: 186); both of them made fiction films as well as documentary films, which is evident in their styles; both tackled politics via their films; both directors featured odd moments in their films, such as when female characters breastfeed adult men, namely in Imamura’s *Nippon konchūki* [にっぽん昆虫記] / *The Insect Woman* (1963) and in Makavejev’s *Sweet Movie* (1974); and both directors had pungent sense of humour that seeped into their films. Moreover, an important trait that they have in common is that, throughout the opuses of both directors, there are examples of (wo)man-as-an-animal metaphor. As Creed notes, “film has the power to speak to the viewer about the animal *in* the human” (Creed 2015: 44, emphasis original). To her, some films adopt a cinematic zoomorphic perspective, by eroding the human-animal boundary and representing humans as animals (Creed 2015: 52–4). Through close reading of several films, I will investigate such zoomorphic representations.

## Cat

In two of his movies, namely *Čovek nije tica/Man is Not a Bird* (1965) and *Ljubavni slučaj, ili tragedija službenice P.T.T./Love Affair, or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator* (1967) Makavejev uses a black cat as a leitmotif signifying untamed and unbound female sexuality. This mysterious and wild creature sparks the desire of men to tame it. Therefore, black cats stand for women as free beings, posing a challenge to men to domesticate them. For example, in *Love Affair, or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator* in one scene the camera follows Isabella’s (Eva Ras) seductive movement, sexually and financially emancipated Yugoslav woman. She wears only black lace underpants, while traversing from the bed to the door in order to take two cartons of milk that the milkman left. She carries them so that they cover her naked breasts. Then, a black cat is shown, sitting beside an empty plate. Isabella approaches and crouches, in a medium long shot (that encompasses her partner Ahmed as well, who is in the bed). Her action of pouring milk in the plate is shown in close-up detail, but without the cat in the shot. Ultimately, Isabella is depicted in close-up, drinking milk straight out of the carton. Makavejev establishes the connection between a woman and an animal not only with the fact that the cat is black and Isabella is wearing (only) black underpants, but also with the action of milk-drinking, which was expected to be done by the cat, not by the woman, as if the cat was the woman herself.

Also, approximately in the middle of the film, Makavejev framed the main heroine Isabella in full shot, lying on bed, positioned on her belly, naked, with a black cat that reposes on her behind. The beauty of this composition is underlined through the usage of black and white photography, by contrasting the porcelain skin of Isabella's nude body, white sheets she is lying on, and the blackness of the cat resting on Isabella. The cat and the woman are in sync, tranquil.

In another scene, later in the movie, Isabella is in the background of the shot, facing the camera, nude and sitting on the bed with her legs bent beneath her, while her partner Ahmed (Slobodan Aligrudić) is shown in a reverse shot, sitting on the bed backwards to the camera in the foreground. The black cat is in Isabella's lap, while the animal's fur is covering her private parts. Such a representation (a cat positioned in close proximity to a woman's genital area) can imply the threat to men of a woman's fatal genital trap (Creed 2007[1993]: 108). In contrast, in the background, further above, is a painting of a woman holding a child, surrounded by little angels, denoting motherhood as the ultimate and divine purpose of a woman's life. With the later development of the events in the plot, Isabella's pregnancy – for which it is unclear whether Isabella has been impregnated by her partner Ahmed or by a postman with whom she had a one-night stand while Ahmed was away on a business trip – this becomes a quite ironic imagery. The context changes the meaning. Moreover, the director also stresses motherhood and sexuality in another scene of the film. It is a cartomancy scene, filmed in one take, encompassing both Isabella and her female co-worker, who reads Isabella's destiny from cards at their workplace. Director Makavejev not only foreshadows the main heroine's imminent adultery via card reading, but also implies Isabella's impending pregnancy via an enlarged stamp of motherhood hung on a wall. The stamp is located on the upper left-hand side of the shot in the background. It has a mother holding a child depicted on it, and "Yugoslavia" inscribed on it in the bottom. Thus, the director gradually introduces how within Isabella, a liberated Yugoslav woman, two diametrically opposed tendencies will clash – modernity and tradition.

One more scene of this movie underlines the conflict between the opposing tendencies in Isabella – her urge for personal freedom versus traditional housewife role expected by patriarchal Balkan society (which remained strong in family sphere despite socialist reforms towards gender equality), whose embodiment is Ahmed. Isabella prepares a homemade blubbery pie in Ahmed's presence, underscored with music from Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida: Act II, Grand March* that transforms an ordinary act of cooking into grandiose, ceremonial, and to some extent comical one. The camera follows the black

cat, who roams freely in the flat towards the kitchen table, when the following shot transforms into an upwards tilt that stops on the close-up of blubbery pie preparation. Then, in a medium long shot in the foreground, Isabella is shown facing the camera, immersed in blueberry pie preparation, wearing an apron and a scarf around her hair as an adjustment of her usually attractive attire to the homey role she assumed. The black cat is in the background, with her back turned towards the camera and to Isabella, sitting on the windowsill, looking outside as if lamenting her freedom. However, the cat jumps down, back to the kitchen, as if accepting to be domesticated. Further in the movie, in the scene just before Isabella is going to commit adultery, she is shown next to the same window (where the black cat sat before), but which is closed this time, signifying entrapment and her monotonous domestic life confined within the boundaries of her home. She is in a medium close-up, en face, with curlers on her hair as a symbol of her assumed housewife role. The black cat is nowhere to be seen and is seemingly tamed. Isabella plays with a bubble made of liquid detergent that eventually breaks. This implies that for her, a modern woman, stay-at-home happiness is as fleeting as a bubble of soap. In a direct address to the camera, she exclaims that her man went away to do fieldwork for a month, and that people are not made of stone<sup>2</sup>, especially her. She highlights her own weakness of flesh that will result in adultery – a one-night stand with a post-man. When Ahmed returns, he finds out that she is pregnant and offers her marriage, but Isabela declines. Rejected and heavily drunk, Ahmed goes to a Roman well with an urge to kill himself, while Isabela follows him due to being worried about him. There he accidentally pushes Isabela to her death inside the well by drowning. The director represents Isabella's character as impelled by untamed passions, animal instincts, and sexual drives beyond her control, which ultimately trigger her demise.

In his earlier movie, *Man is Not a Bird*, Makavejev also chooses a female protagonist of similar physical features like Isabella – a beautiful blond woman Rajka (Milena Dravić) who, likewise, owns a black cat. The appearance of the enigmatic animal is again not coincidental, but the director's deliberate choice so as to draw a parallel between a woman and a black cat. The first time the black cat appears in the film is when Jan (Janez Vrhovec) – an engineer who lives as a tenant in Rajka's house – is shown petting it on his lap during a conversation with Rajka. Then, right after Rajka exits his room, he fondles with his hand a black bedcover that reminisces of fur, while the black cat sits next to him on the black bedcover. Makavejev amplifies the action of hand-fondling by underscoring it with dramatic music and freezing the frame of Jan's hand as

---

2 She says "not made of wood" in Serbo-Croatian.

it caresses the black bedcover. Jan's hand gestures suggest his desire for Rajka, even before it eventually develops into a (short) relationship with her. Later in the film, the morning after they had sex for the first time, Rajka and Jan are shown on the very same black bedcover. Rajka's head is resting on his lap, while Jan pets her hair, which is a reminder to a viewer how Jan petted the black cat on his lap, while lying on the black bedcover.

Furthermore, in other scenes of the film Makavejev achieves woman-as-animal metaphor by similar positioning of Rajka and the black cat, on the black bedcover that resembles fur, but in two separate shots of each of them and with relatively similar framing. There is a pan that glides all over the side of Rajka's partially visible nude body, which rests on her belly and is partially wrapped in the black bedcover. The pan starts from her feet, moves towards the right, until medium close-up of Rajka's face, when the pan stops. The bareness of Rajka's skin, contrasted with the furry black bedcover, not only makes a creatively composed shot, but also makes Rajka look like a seductive cat-woman who has just shed off her fur and taken human form. That scene is intercut with a scene that shows Jan at work in a factory, assembling phallic machines. Then, almost the same as the above mentioned medium close-up of Rajka – with hints of her full nudity in the black bedcover – is repeated and again juxtaposed to the shots of Jan at work. Such editing approach suggests the contrast between Rajka's youthful desire and Jan's middle-aged desire sublimated into workaholic-ness. The editing pattern changes with an extreme long shot of Jan and Rajka in exterior, as they walk in a vast barren landscape, with dried cracked soil. They are apart, which suggests emotional distance between them, amplified with Rajka's comment, whose gist is that Jan is never around, as if he is married to his work. The shot is dissolved into the interior scene medium shot of Rajka and Jan in bed, cuddling, immersed in the black bedcover. Rajka poses a question to Jan, who is supposed to leave town in less than ten days (when he is scheduled to complete his work), how he will manage without her. When he retorts that he will take her with him, the scene is suddenly intercut with a shot of the black cat on the black bedcover. Considering that the black cat was not present in the scene with Rajka and Jan (in the black bedcover) in which it is embedded, it serves as an accent, which foreshadows that Rajka might not be tamed and actually might not go away with Jan (who does not dedicate her the time she deserves, due to his work). The black cat shot evokes the medium close-up shot of seductive Rajka in the black bedcover, shown earlier in the film. Therefore, director Makavejev yet again establishes the link between a woman and a feline animal.

Unlike Makavejev, Imamura features a cat in a different context, without symbolism, namely in *The Insect Woman*. After breaking a vial with frozen human blood, which they were trying to heat up, three prostitutes contemplate to draw blood from one of them. Instead, they come up with an idea to use blood from a cat, and grab the cat that was present in the room in order to draw its blood, with an exclamation that it is a real virgin. The reason behind such an act is that one of them is supposed to deceive a client that she is a virgin, so she plans to plant the cat's blood in place of hymen blood. Therefore, in this instance director Imamura does not use cat as a symbol. However, he frequently resorts to using mouse symbolism in another film.

### Mice and Rats

*Insects, animals and humans are similar in the sense that they are born, they excrete, reproduce and die. Nevertheless, I myself am a man. I ask myself what differentiates humans from other animals. What is a human being? I look for the answer by continuing to make films. I don't think I have found the answer.* (Imamura in Laprévotte 1997: 101)

In Imamura's movie *Akai satsui* [赤い殺意]/*Intentions of Murder* a.k.a. *Unholy Desire* (1964), a housewife Sadako (Masumi Harukawa) leads a monotonous life, like a pet mouse pointlessly running its wheel. Imamura visually captures this comparison throughout the film, for instance in a shot of two caged mice futilely spinning their wheel in the foreground and Sadako in the background, equally uselessly doing her household bills' calculations, in order to report (on a regular basis) money consumption to her partner, who is the breadwinner. The woman-as-animal metaphor highlights that she is confined to the house and trapped in a loveless relationship, exactly like the mice entrapped within the cage (Mes & Sharp 2005: 28). The only solace she has is her child and food. Chubby and voluptuous, she is an example of an emotional eater. When feeling down, as a pattern, Sadako stuffs herself like a rodent. Also, Imamura highlights the connection between mice and food by placing the cage with mice on a fridge, as shown in one shot with a camera tilt that glides downwards, from the cage to the fridge. Therefore, Imamura implicitly creates a triangle, consisting of mice, food, and Sadako. Eating as self-defense mechanism helps Sadako keep on going after being assaulted by a burglar and raped. She tries to throw herself in front of a train, but then has a change of heart, so instead of killing herself she goes to the kitchen where she finds strength. Her internal monologue states that since she is going to die anyway, she might as well see her son Masaru first.

Framed in a medium shot, Sadako eats, while mice are spinning the wheel in the foreground, implying that she will keep on living. At that point of the movie, there are two mice in the cage. Afterwards one eats the other, which is a metaphor for the inhumanity of the humans. Her son Masaru puts that in a drawing, shown in a close-up detail shot, of the smaller mouse devouring the bigger one. Imamura wanted to convey that plump Sadako is being mistreated and underappreciated by her unwedded life partner, smaller in built than her, who did not officially recognize her as a wife in a family register, or as a mother of their child. When Sadako makes another attempt to commit suicide (this time with natural gas), after being sexually violated again by the same burglar, she is shown in an extreme close-up, as she observes the caged mouse next to her, running in circles, chasing his own tail. In all of the above-mentioned shots, where the comparison of the main heroine with a mouse is emphasised, there is a gradual increase in shot sizes of the heroine and her progressive advance in space from background towards foreground, while the mice always remain in the foreground. Namely, in the first shot with the mice, near the beginning of the movie, Sadako was shown in the long shot, distanced. In the next shot with the mice, she was shown in the medium shot while eating. When attempting suicide with gas, in the shot with one mouse, she is shown in extreme close-up. This gradual advance of camera's as well as viewers' proximity to Sadako is proportional to her growing anguish and despair. Eventually, the last remaining mouse dies. The mouse cage is shown for the last time – at that point empty – when Sadako takes poison to kill her rapist, who became her lover (which is an extremely problematic aspect of the film). Nevertheless, she has a change of heart, which still does not change the course of events because he dies anyway, of natural causes – heart attack. Ultimately, unlike a mouse Sadako has been compared to, she finds her way out of the maze through progressive change of her character, from passive victim to active agent, in control of her own life.

A comparison can be made between the motif of a mouse spinning the wheel in Imamura's *Intentions of Murder* and Makavejev's work, for instance in *Manifesto* (1988). The film is set in 1920 Central Europe, in a country ruled by a tyrannical king (which might be Makavejev's hint at Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and, at the time, the Karadjordjević ruling family). There are revolutionaries who oppose the king and plot against him. One of them, Rudi (Svetozar Cvetković), is arrested by the police for his political stances and placed in an institution where he is supposed to receive "natural re-education". He is put inside a big spinning wheel, entitled "permanent revolution rotor", modelled after the spinning wheel used for the study of fatigue in rats.

Therefore, Rudi becomes a human-mouse spinning the wheel, as a punishment for his political stances against the social order and terror. While spinning the wheel, he defiantly exclaims to his captors that he likes movement and does not mind dying for the (revolutionary) movement. However, eventually he grows fond of his entrapment. So, when his female comrade comes to set him free, he locks himself back inside the spinning wheel – “because they serve good food” and because “the movement must have its martyrs” – even if it means dying of fire that his comrade accidentally sets in the institution, by breaking some vials with chemicals. Rudi is a lost cause, as his comrade says about him, and perhaps stands for the futility of Marxist permanent revolution.

Besides the above mentioned examples, there are other references to rodents in their opuses. For instance, in Makavejev's *Love Affair, or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator* Ahmed's profession is a rat catcher, while in Imamura's *Kamigami no Fukaki Yokubō* [神々の深き欲望]/*Profound Desire(s) of the Gods* (1968), a wild girl Toriko Futori (Hideko Okiyama) catches a rat with her bare hands. In addition, Makavejev resorts to the symbolism of a mouse in his fictional film *Sweet Movie*. The essential difference between the two auteurs, Imamura and Makavejev, is that while in *Intentions of Murder* a mouse represents caged existence of a housewife, in *Sweet Movie* a mouse stands for male prey. Namely, in *Sweet Movie* a man is juxtaposed to his pet white mouse, especially in a sugar basin, into which they are both immersed during his sexual act with a woman. In contrast, the woman, who will eventually stab him in that very basin where she lured him, is juxtaposed to felines throughout the film; namely to cats, as well as to a tiger head (of taxidermy tiger skin rug) with an open mouth and bared fangs, which is shown close to the woman's vagina, thus suggesting it is vagina dentate. This is in line with Makavejev's overall style to often represent women as felines. Therefore, Makavejev's men are mice, who fall victim to women and history, while Imamura's woman is a mouse who changes her destiny.

In Imamura's *Intentions of Murder*, another motif from the animal world is a silkworm, used to demonstrate that the tables have turned and that Sadako gained control. For the first time, it is shown within a retrospective scene in the first half of the movie, when Sadako was a young servant for her future partner and his mother. There is a close-up detail shot of Sadako's nude thigh, with a silkworm on it that fondles the thigh with its movement as Sadako lures it with a leaf. The future mother-in-law discovers this display of the development of Sadako's sexuality, the symbolism of a child becoming a woman, so she beats her. Imamura shows in close-up how Sadako still holds the silkworm in her

fist during the beating, but as a result of the violence that she suffers the insect eventually gets squashed in her fist. The very last shot of the film is similar to the one mentioned before, of Sadako's thigh with a silkworm on it, with the difference that now it is the shot of a grown-up Sadako, evoking the childhood memory already presented. Nevertheless, the context changed, so the similar, rather eroticized imagery conveys completely different meaning – of personal awakening instead of sexual. Sadako went through a metamorphosis, from uselessly spinning the wheel as a mouse, to usefully spinning silk as a silkworm. In the beginning, she was not even recognized as an official mother of her child in the family register (because her partner's mother was stated there instead, as the mother of her son Masaru), and she herself did not exist in the family register. Sadako transformed from a completely submissive, financially dependent homemaker, with a status of childbearing common-law wife and servant, into being legally recognized as the mother of her son Masaru and being financially independent by starting a sewing business. The film ends with a slow upwards tilt, from the shot of Sadako's thigh with silkworm on it, onto her face in the extreme close-up, showing that she is at peace with herself and her life. The frame freezes for the end of the movie, signifying that Sadako reached her perpetual contentment. Imamura's freeze frame immortalises his female character as a survivor, not as victim. As Donald Richie observantly notes, "Imamura's women are all survivors" (Richie 2005: 187).

Similarly to Imamura, Makavejev also uses freeze-frame, for instance in *Man is Not a Bird*. Towards the end of the film, there is a scene in which a young truck driver, with whom Rajka have just had (a one-night stand) sex inside a truck, is washing the truck with a (phallic) hose. The shot of Rajka's hands with spread fingers, pressed against the windshield from the inside, while the water is pouring on the windshield from the outside, suddenly becomes a freeze-frame, accentuating her hands as the signifier of her pleasure (mirroring the freeze-frame shown earlier in the film, of Jan's hand fondling black bedcover, signifying his desire for Rajka). The day after, her partner Jan will violently grab her by the very same hands, by the wrists, when he finds out that she cheated on him, even though he shares the responsibility for her infidelity due to sexually neglecting her because of his work. She escapes and their relationship ends. Previously in the film, Rajka is also punished for her active sexuality, because her mother beats her when her parents discover that she and their tenant Jan have been having sex. In addition, in Makavejev's *Love Affair, or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator* Isabella is accidentally pushed to her death by her partner, on whom she cheated. Therefore, Makavejev's feline women suffer patriarchal punishment for their liberal sexual behaviour.

## Eggs and Birds

Similar to Imamura's silkworm that can transform itself into a moth as well as produce beautiful silk, Makavejev uses an egg, the symbol of life and reproduction, which also has power to transform and potentially grow into a bird, a symbol of freedom. By the recurrence of the egg motif, Makavejev accentuates further the matters of sexuality and fertility of a female body. In his fiction film *Love Affair, or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator* Isabella breaks an egg while she is making a pie for her partner Ahmed in an attempt of self-domestication. Also, in one of the embedded documentary segments of the film, a real-life expert for sexual matters, Dr Aleksandar Đ. Kostić, takes an egg out of a chicken cage and in his direct address to camera states: "An egg is not created for the purpose of humans eating scrambled eggs, but the egg represents the most perfect cell of reproduction of female gender. And in that cell there is already a seed of life."<sup>3</sup> Thus, the egg broken by Isabella can be interpreted as an inhibited reproductive ability because the eggshell is cracked without a chick being hatched from it, symbolizing an intercourse that doesn't lead to bearing an offspring. Regardless whether it stands for a potential of reproduction or its hindrance, this egg is its metaphor. However, the possibility of life – through Isabella's pregnancy – is cracked as an eggshell, because Isabella dies accidentally while trying to save drunken, suicidal Ahmed, who inadvertently pushes her into a well. Commensurate with de Lauretis' reading of Freud, where it is stated that if the death drive is directed "outwards, towards objects (others), the destructive drive is thus a secondary manifestation of a primary, self-destructive death drive" (de Lauretis 2008: 97), Ahmed's suicidal drive is redirected outwards, towards Isabella. Earlier in the film she rejects him by stating that she did not sign any (marriage) paper to enslave herself with him and thus declines his offer of a patriarchal nuclear family. Bearing this in mind, the question poses itself whether Makavejev intended to point out that if women neglect their expected primary function as child-bearers and mothers, within the patriarchal family as a basic cell of a male dominated society, the punishment would follow?

Similar to Makavejev's scene with Dr Kostić in a chicken cage, Imamura also places the housewife Sadako in it, in his fictional film *Intentions of Murder*. She is sent to a chicken cage to fetch some eggs. However, besides symbolical meaning of egg and chicken akin to Makavejev's related to sex and reproduction, Imamura's function of entrapping Sadako inside a chicken cage is also to suggest her entrapment in life. During the cage scene, she has a conversation

---

3 My translation from Serbo-Croatian.

with an old woman, from which it can be inferred that Sadako is a prisoner of the past of her late grandmother whom she never met, who was a poor mistress of a master of an affluent household, and who hanged herself after his family took away her illegitimate daughter. Sadako is also a prisoner of her own fate, of the facts that she initially worked as a poor maid in that very household and that she bore a child to the grandson of the master of the household, to whom she is not married (and is implicitly blood-related). At that point in the film, she is not even registered in the family register as the mother of her son Masaru (which she will later accomplish). Instead, he is registered as the son of her (unlawful) mother-in-law. So, there is an implicit threat that Sadako's son might be taken away from her, just like Sadako's mother was taken away from her own mother, Sadako's grandmother. Besides the entrapment symbolism for Imamura, for both directors a chicken cage, eggs, and chicken, stand for prolongation and extension of life and bloodline via reproduction.

In addition, Makavejev also features an egg in the film *W.R. Mysteries of Organism*. In the introductory sequence with opening credits, two female and one male character are playing with an egg yolk by transferring it from each other's hand, until it gets dispersed between their interspersed hands that end up fondling each other. The sequence is followed with a sequence entitled "Filme Der Sexpol"<sup>4</sup>, in which a couple, as seen through a kaleidoscope, multiplied in seven shapes resembling a hexagon honeycomb, starts making out and eventually copulating on grass. Therefore, Makavejev again draws a parallel between human reproduction and animal egg, which stands for sexual and life energy, for a seed of life – a potential which might or might not develop. In a similar vein, Makavejev juxtaposes human sexual act and chicken egg in his *Sweet Movie*. Miss Canada (Carole Laure) and El Macho (Sami Frey) get stuck during copulation at Eifel tower, as a consequence of "penis captivus", a woman's vaginal clamping on a man's penis. They are carried on a stretcher to a nearby restaurant and released from the sexual spasm after an injection administered by a nurse to Miss Canada's buttocks. El Macho soon recovers his macho composure and starts singing in Spanish accompanied by Mariachi ensemble, until the moment Miss Canada breaks two eggs on her head, which provokes tears in El Macho's eyes. Besides alluding to interrupted sexual act in which no egg was fertilised, perhaps Makavejev wanted to allude as well to El Macho's testicles (which in Makavejev's native Serbo-Croatian in slang

4 The sequence is a reference to Wilhelm Reich's book of essays entitled *Sex-pol*, and it is underscored with a female voice-over commentary about Reich's theory – on the importance of releasing sexual energy and the dire, repressive consequences if it does not get released – intercut with a song about Yugoslav League of Communists (The Party).

are often referred to as “eggs”) and his sexual apparatus in general, which was subjected to pain during the sexual act.

Although no bird is shown hatching from an egg in Makavejev’s films, in his autobiographical documentary *Rupa u duši/Hole in the Soul* (1994) there is a metaphor of a man as a bird, when a shot of a flying bird is shown and juxtaposed to the next shot, of people flying through air, as they jump off Mostar Old Bridge into river Neretva. Makavejev tackled the same symbolism in his fictional film *Man is not a Bird*, when a workaholic engineer Jan, whose personal life suffers due to his job, scolds a factory worker, who is a former circus member, for swinging high on ropes at workplace. Jan reproaches him that he is not a bird but a worker, and that a worker must stand firmly on the ground. The line Jan delivers is reflected in the title of the film *Man is not a Bird*. Considering that birds are frequently symbols of freedom, the title of the film implies that human beings are often not free, especially from duties, difficulties, confinement, or troubles, and that their hopes and dreams are often not fulfilled. Imamura also features the motif of birds in *Profound Desire(s) of the Gods*, in a scene in which a father, Nekichi Futori (Rentarô Mikuni), and a son, Kametarô Futori (Chôichirô Kawarasaki), go to picturesque Bird Island, inhabited by flocks of birds that fly around freely. They talk about a Holy Island where there are no rules. Also, they touch upon the issue of incest, which their family is notorious of amongst the islanders. However, the father denies any accusations of fraternising with his own sister Uma Futori (Yasuko Matsui), with the words that “Human beings aren’t allowed such things. Humans must not imitate Gods.” This is the reference to the founding myth of the island. According to the myth, two Gods, a brother and a sister came by a boat with a red sail, and founded the island by starting to procreate. Therefore, similar to Makavejev’s, Imamura’s birds also suggest freedom, namely of (incest) desire, tolerated in Gods, but denied to humans.

## Pigs

In his fictional film *Profound Desire(s) of the Gods*, Imamura utilises another human-as-animal metaphor, namely of a man as a pig. In the first part of the film, several pigs are shown transported by a boat in a sea. One of the pigs falls into the sea, where a shark lurks with his ominous fin. Soon, the pig is slaughtered by the shark and the sea turns red. There is another scene towards the end of the film that mirrors this scene. Two runaways, a brother and a sister, the aforementioned Nekichi and Uma, are stranded on a boat with red sail that suffered engine failure. They broke the rules of their village in

multiple ways, including harbouring incestuous feelings and venturing to the sea (which was forbidden to their family, ostracised throughout generations for their misdeeds). The villagers pursue them in wooden boats in order to punish them, because they wrongly believe that Nekichi killed a man (whose mistress was Uma), even though the man died of natural causes. Amongst the villagers is Kametaro, Nekichi's son, who will not harm his father during the looming revenge of the villagers. When the villagers, who wear ritual masks (because there is the village festival taking place), catch up with the runaways, they repeatedly bludgeon Nekichi on the head with wooden oars, until his head bleeds heavily. He ends up in the sea. Attracted by blood, soon a shark appears with its ominous fin. The fate of the man is the same as the one of the pig from the beginning of the film. In the reddish sunset, villagers also punish Uma by tying her to the mast of the red sail, which they spread. They row away and leave her to float until she meets her death. Imamura uses the symbolism of the pig, amplified with the usage of red colour, to convey allegory that the brother and sister are punished with demise for their animalistic, incestuous desire; because incest is not allowed to humans, but only to Gods.

Imamura also compares men to the pigs in *Buta to gunkan* [豚と軍艦]/*Pigs and Battleships* (1961), because they are often greedy and without honour. This is understood even from the title of the movie and stretches as a leitmotif throughout it. For example, already in the opening credits of the film, shots of pigs, transported on trucks, are shown. They are part of a shady business, undertaken by Japanese gang (yakuza) members, which includes obtaining food scraps from American military base in order to feed the pigs. Later in the film, when yakuza gang members eat a roasted pig, they find a false tooth, and realise that the pig was fed a dead body of their opponent. Most of them stop eating and start vomiting when they find it out, except for one, who does not see a problem there. The overall impression of the scene is as if they cannibalised not only on the human, but on the pig as well. Imamura extends the pig metaphor to the wider context of Japanese relations with the US, which has held its political grip on Japan since the end of WW2, secured through the signature of US-Japan security treaties (in 1951 and 1960) and establishment of military bases all over Japan. The film is set in the naval town of Yokosuka in Japan, where American battleships often sailed in and which was swarming with US military personnel. In one scene of the film, a shot of three piglets, cramped in a cart and strapped with rope that hinders them from any freedom of movement, is underscored with a voiceover of a Japanese schoolboy's lesson, stating that "Japan has become a modern, independent state". Thus, the voiceover serves as a counterpoint to the image and hints at Japan's political dependence and subjugation to the US.

Imamura further amplifies the impression of political suppression, with a scene when a Japanese girl is gang raped by three US marines, allegorically suggesting Japan's political rape by the US (Imamura in Kitamura 2019: 50). In addition, the leitmotif of a pig appears in the scene when a Chinese businessman, engaged in shady activities, refers to a Japanese businessman of similar sort, involved in the shady business with pigs, as "a stupid pig". The Chinese businessman also says about an American man of Japanese origin – who will con the shady Japanese businessman in the pig business – that he is "the worst kind: a pig who believes in democracy". The culmination of the juxtaposition of men with pigs is in the final scene of yakuza gunfight, which occurs within the gang that deals with pigs. Yakuza henchmen offend their boss, the Japanese shady businessman, by calling him a pig man, while he retorts to them that they are a bunch of swine. Kinta (Hiroyuki Nagato), the sympathetic small-time yakuza, forces all of them at gunpoint to release numerous pigs from trucks on which they were loaded, to run free in the streets. He dies with a rifle in his hands, from hands of other gang members, after refusing to be a scape goat for the gang and to go to jail for a murder. Pig-stampede pursues the gang members and throngs inside an alley where the gang members escaped. Despite their attempts to climb up, pigs run them over. In one close-up shot, Imamura juxtaposes two yakuza faces, on the sides of the shot – placed horizontally, and squashed by pigs' bodies (both from above and below in the shot) – with a pig snout, in the middle of the shot. When the shootout is over, Imamura reinforces the human-pig metaphor, with shots of dead gang-members being carried away by police, one by one on a stretcher, interspersed with shots of dead pigs being carried away, also one by one on a stretcher, as observed by curious passers-by. Eventually, Kinta's dead body on the stretcher is placed in a truck on top of dead pigs' bodies, which closes the pig metaphor.

Makavejev's documentary *Hole in the Soul* also depicts pigs, but with a different symbolism than Imamura's. Namely, small dead piglets are shown, sold at a market place in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In addition, the film features a huge adult female pig that is pampered and kept as a pet at a film festival (AFI/L.A. FilmFest) in the US. She is fed popcorn, adorned with two earrings, and let to roam freely inside a movie theatre. Besides, she is promenaded on a leash along the Hollywood Walk of Fame, stepping with its cloven-hoofs, painted in pink, on the stars of actors, such as Greta Garbo, and later, on top of handprints of film stars, including Shirley Temple's, in front of Mann's Chinese Theatre. Perhaps Makavejev suggests, with the size of animals and their treatment, the contrast between the poverty-stricken rump state FR Yugoslavia and the affluence of the US.

Furthermore, in Makavejev's *Montenegro: Or Pigs and Pearls* (1981), there is a roasted pig impaled on a wooden stick that a Yugoslav female immigrant tries to bring into Sweden, but it is confiscated at the airport. The pearls from the subtitle of the film suggest the affluence of a docile housewife, originally from the US but married and living in Sweden, who wears them; while pigs could be interpreted as Yugoslav immigrants in Sweden, lowlifes living on the margins of society, who are paradoxically more alive and full of joie de vivre than the members of Swedish high class. The contrast between the two social strata – high class and low class – is best exemplified exactly at the airport. The rich docile housewife, wearing fur coat and pearls, is detained by customs authorities for trying to bring on board her gardening shears, so she misses her departure to an exotic destination, namely Brazil; while the Yugoslav female immigrant is also detained for having prohibited items when entering Sweden, so consequently her moonshine rakija and roasted pig are seized. The items testify of insurmountable class difference, which will temporarily be blurred when the pearl-lady enters the den of Yugoslav immigrants in Sweden.

## Conclusion

To my knowledge, the comparison between the two directors, Imamura and Makavejev, has not been done before, especially not through looking into animal symbolism that imbues their creative opuses. The juxtaposition of (wo)men with animals reveals some traits of human nature, which are highlighted due to being represented from the zoomorphic perspective. The metaphor of a woman as a feline implies her untamed, fatal sexuality that brings misfortune to a male character, who wants to control the feline woman and her sexuality, which eventually brings her some kind of patriarchal punishment (psychological or physical). On the one hand, in Makavejev's opus men are rodents that fall prey either to feline, predatory women or to history. On the other hand, in Imamura's oeuvre, a woman is a futile mouse who can overcome her futility and transform into a useful silkworm, that is, a survivor who metamorphoses and takes charge of her life. Furthermore, in Imamura's films pigs symbolise human greediness and lack of morals, while in Makavejev's world they imply a low social stratum one has in a society. For both directors, metaphors of birds suggest freedom or lack of it, while their eggs symbolise procreation which might or might not lead to an offspring. Therefore, metaphors of women as felines, (wo)men as mice, (wo)men as pigs, men as birds and so on, reveal the animal in the human, hidden or in plain sight, and waiting to be tamed or released from the depths of human condition.

## References

- Coleman, Lindsay, and David Desser (2019) “Introduction”, in *Killers, Clients and Kindred Spirits: The Taboo Cinema of Shohei Imamura*, edited by Lindsay Coleman and David Desser, pp. 1–20. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Creed, Barbara (2015) “Films, gestures, species”, *Journal for Cultural Research*, 19:1, 43–55, DOI: 10.1080/14797585.2014.920182
- ---- (2007[1993]) *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Daković, Nevena (2014) “Dušan Makavejev: invisible and visible theory”, *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, 5:1, 80–84, DOI: 10.1080/2040350X.2014.878596.
- De Lauretis, Teresa (2008) *Freud’s Drive: Psychoanalysis, Literature and Film*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Desser, David (1988) *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Ilić, Mihajlo P. (2008) *Serbian Cutting*. Belgrade: Filmski centar Srbije.
- Kitamura, Hiroshi (2019) “Confronting America: *Pigs and Battleships* and the Politics of US Bases in Postwar Japan”, in *Killers, Clients and Kindred Spirits: The Taboo Cinema of Shohei Imamura*, edited by Lindsay Coleman and David Desser, pp. 41–55. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Laprévotte, Gilles (1997) “Shohei Imamura: Human, All Too Human”, in *Shohei Imamura*, edited by James Quandt, pp. 101–106. Toronto: Toronto International Film Festival Group.
- Mes, Tom, and Jasper Sharp (2005) *The Midnight Eye guide to New Japanese Film*. Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press.
- Richie, Donald (2005) *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film: A Concise History*. Tokyo: Kodansha International.

Vesi Vuković  
Voluntary postdoctoral researcher of the  
Visual and Digital Cultures Research Centre (ViDi)  
at University of Antwerp

## ČOVEK KAO ŽIVOTINJA: FILMOVI DUŠANA MAKAVEJEVA I ŠOHEIJA IMAMURE

### *Apstrakt*

*Cilj ovog članka je istraživanje autorskih opusa režisera Šoheija Imamure (Shohei Imamura) i Dušana Makavejeva, naročito s fokusom na to kako su predstavili rod i seksualnost, kao i uloge žena i muškaraca u društvima suočenim s promjenama. Dva režisera imali su nekoliko zajedničkih karakteristika: oba su bila pod uticajem filmova japanskog režisera Akire Kurosave (Akira Kurosawa); oba su stvarala igrane i dokumentarne filmove, a ponekad i hibride nastale kombinacijom oba žanra; oba režisera su izražavala političku kritiku posredstvom svojih filmova, i preispitivali socijalne i seksualne tabue; oba su imali čudne primjere u svojim filmovima, poput žena koje doje odrasle muškarce (Imamura u filmu Žena insekt i Makavejev u filmu Slatki film); i oba režisera su imala britak smisao za humor koji je prožimao njihove filmove. Još jedna istaknuta osobina Imamurinog i Makavejevog rada je da se u opusima obojice iznova pojavljuje metafora čovjeka kao životinje. Na primjer, neki od njihovih filmova zauzimaju kinematografski zoomorfični stav, suprotstavljajući životinju i čovjeka, i brišući granicu između čovjeka i životinje. Dakle, ja ću istraživati zoomorfične predstave, putem metode close reading njihovih filmova.*

### *Ključne riječi*

*Dušan Makavejev, Šoheji Imamura, jugoslovenski novi film, japanski nuberu bagu, čovjek kao životinja*

Примљено: 14. марта 2023.

Прихваћено: 7. априла 2023.