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Women Filmmakers at Ostranenie

Katy Deepwell

While there were many films presented at Ostranenie, these pages are dedicated to profiling the women film-makers whose work was show there. A part of the festival was dedicated to examining the legacy and achievements of media pioneers, Moholy-Nagy, Tesla, Schriabin, Oscar Sala, Lev Theremin; this was a section from which women innovators were notable by their absence.

This is the third Ostranenie festival designed to exhibit work and bring together artists from Eastern European countries who work in film, video, multi-media, electronic music and electronic arts in installation, internet and CD-Rom forms.

This year's Ostranenie was organised by Stephen Kovats and Nina Czegledy and took place in five main sites in Dessau. Most of the video screenings were at the former Bauhaus building in Dessau with an internet cafe at K.I.E.Z e.V, an arts centre in the city. There were exhibitions installed on both sites and in the Marienkirche.

A special programme 'Women at the End of the Millennium' was introduced by curator Bojana Pejic.

- * Milla Moilanen *Scale* (8.25 mins, Finland, 1996)
- * Dragana Zarevac *Ocaj-Le Deuil / The Despair* (5.20 mins Yugoslavia, 1996)
- * Olga Tobreluts *Game or 2 Love Stories* (10.00mins, Russia, 1997)
- * Natalia Borisova *Tri Verlibra/Three Verlibrs* (3.30 mins, Russia, 1996)
- * Infiniti Evil (3.30 mins, Russia, 1996)
- * Anna Kucynska/Katarzyna Radkowska *Nazarieff* (11 mins, Poland, 1993/1994)
- * Elena Patoprsta *Love on the End of the Millenium/ Liebe am Ende des Milenium* (3.00 mins Slovakia, Germany, 1996)

* Elena Patoprsta *Attention, Love! / Vosicht, Liebe!*(3.00 mins Slovakia, Germany, 1996)

* Biba Vickovic *Demokrata / The Democrat* (5 mins Yugoslavia, 1994)

* Perry Bard *My Little Box of Nazis* (3.36 mins, USA, 1997)

Also in the programme, but not screened on the day, Rotraut Pape *Nicht nur Wasser/Not Just Water* (25.47 mins Deutschland,1995)

Women videomakers featured strongly in the Crossing Over programme which arose from a series of workshops sponsored by the Soros foundation in Sofia.

The 'Crossing Over' programme included:-

* Darij Kreuh *Blind Wish* (3 mins, Slovenia,1997)

* Odiliya Yankova *I,RNG*(00.53 mins, Bulgaria, 1997) (see interview below)

* Kassimir Terziev *In Search of.....* (3.30 mins , Bulgaria, 1997)

* Elena Belova *Impressions of a Mirror* (2.50mins, Bulgaria, 1997)

* Ivan Mudov *Simon Says....* (2.00mins, Bulgaria, 1997)

* Tsvetelina Gancheva *The Virgin* (3.26 mins Bulgaria,1997)

* Branka Milicic-Davic *Dream* (3 mins Yugoslavia, 1997) (see interview below)

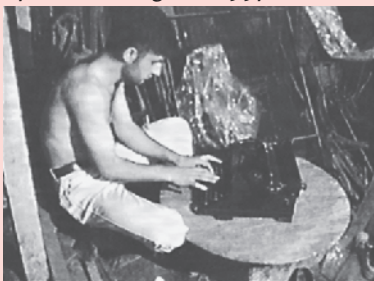
* Denis Neimand *Here* (3.43 mins Russia,1997)

* Collaborative Documentary *Terra Nova* (7.21mins Bulgaria, 1997)

A programme of Video Documentaries by women film-makers was also shown.

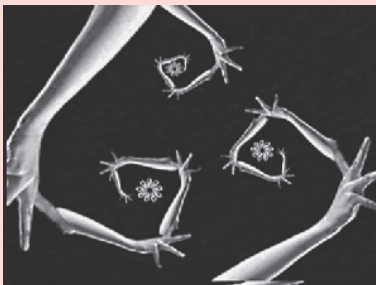
In addition to these special events, women also featured in the general programme which highlighted work from former Eastern European countries and for the first time included work from Albania, Moldova and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

This included a new videowork by a young Albanian woman, Erjona Daka, 'Kotesi / Vanity' (15 mins, 1997). This video shot in a storage shed, featured only one actor. A young man who typed on a typewriter with no paper a series of reflections as he slowly picked up and considered the objects around him ; a child's shoe, a woman's shoe, a boot. The objects seemed to cover a spectrum of life events. At the end of the film, he covers up the typewriter with plastic, hides it away. The film alludes to hidden and secret thoughts but it also suggests that storing information for the self - as an unproductive activity - can be a vain and selfish act.



Above: videostill from Erjona Daka, 'Kotesi / Vanity' (15 mins, 1997)

Below: Anna Henckel-Donnersmarck's 'Busby' (3.18 mins, 1997, Germany)



On a lighter note, a very cleverly crafted and ironic film shown in another programme was Anna Henckel-Donnersmarck's 'Busby' (3.18 mins, 1997, Germany). A parody of Busby Berkeley's routines in an almost Bauhaus-manner using the abstract qualities of hands to form the shapes and movement of dancing. . Ulrike Ettinger's film *Elena Stanciuc: Verusch eine Portrait Germany, 1997 (17 mins)* formed part of the Video Documentary Programme shown in the Ostranenie Festival, November 1997.

The other films in the same programme were:-

- * Russian Umarov/ Natalya Petrova *Chechentsey Drevnyaya Zemlya/ The Chechens Ancient Land* (25 mins, Russia, 1997)
- * Iurie Suiu *Labyrintul/The Labyrinth* (24.30 mins, Moldova, 1992)
- * Olivera Milos-Toderovic: *S Puta u Nemoguće/ From the Road to Impossible* (14.50 mins, Yugoslavia, 1996)
- * Ema Kugler *Postaja 25/Station 25* (30 mins, Slovenia, 1997)
- * Marina Preda Sanc *Zidul Din Turn/The Wall in the Tower* (34 mins. Romania, 1997)
- * Julja Loginova *Vegetatio(n) uber die Russische Kunst* (22mins Russia, 1997)
- * Marina Grznic/Aina Smid *Postsocialism + Retroavantgarda + Irwin* (22.05 mins, Slovenia, 1997)
- * FIA ART : *Made in Serbia* (26.51mins. Yugoslavia, 1997)

Extracts from an Interview with the Dragana Zarevac on her film *Ocaj- Le Deuil / The Despair*, Yugoslavia, 1996 (05.20) at Ostranenie, November 1997.

Dragana Zarevac: I came across the material in this film accidentally. It was meant to be training material for the Yugoslav army and it was about the war in Croatia. My husband was asked to make some copies of it by some friends. He came home and told me he had seen a terrible thing and that I must see it. When I saw it, I couldn't sleep for weeks and I wanted to make some work about it. It is connected to my previous work in some ways and on the other hand it is not. I started as a performer of electronic music and with video about eleven years ago. I mostly deal with traditions. What I like are the common points between different cultures and traditions and I really am enchanted to see the same or similar cultural traces in different cultural traditions and that is mostly what I deal with and study. I also have an education as a singer but I have never been an opera singer or a traditional or classic performer. I always do the music for everything I do as a performer or on video. I make music, do the singing, record it etc.

The topics I have usually dealt with have been the topics of traditions as well and this is why this piece is rather different as well. It deals with a contemporary topic but it is also connected to the tradition because I use this traditional way of singing/ mourning there and I use the lyrics of medieval Serbian poetry. The

lyrics are about the woman who saw her nine sons dead in the war with the Turks. It's a very powerful sad epic song. So I put these different elements together and cut out all the elements that would show the present moment or national belonging or particularity in the sense of situating it in this time and space. I just took elements which would show suffering – looking over the dead, mourning the dead. It's not just something I feel, it is a fact that mourning the dead is common to all traditions. We have always had two groups of people fighting over one piece of land and that is what wars are all about. That is what I also felt at this time. On the other hand, in our war, there was a terrible suffering. I could not be in all the spots at the same moment, but I know Serbians were also killing Serbians, Muslims killing Muslims, Croats killing Croats, not only other nationalities. Everybody suffered and everybody committed crimes and that was terrible and too many people were in this situation. So this is the suffering and pain I wanted to express – it goes through the centuries but is found in the present day. The training film last 45 minutes and shows different pieces of film of people being terrorised, tortured and killed. Different people in different places but also it shows different funeral in totally another context and with another text accompanying it. So I took parts from this 45-minute documentary and took one scene from 1941-1942 of people from a concentration camp at Yasanitzza in Croatia. This is the only image from the past. This is not to highlight the suffering of Croatia but a general historical image of suffering. It is a link across time, not a link with a place. You see the image vanishing and it is like any piece of land people fighting over a piece of land. I wanted more to make that connection through history so to say we have the same suffering repeated over the centuries. You would not know where it was from, except that it was not from Africa.

The film emphasises the mourners but I wouldn't like to put a different value onto the different sexes but I do see the differences especially the different roles in the tradition. Men fight the wars, women mourn and bury the men. It is another sort of general view of death, but in this film there is also a man mourning, a father. That is another archetype alongside the old women dressed in black and mourning.

Odiliya Yankova interview about her film *I,RNG Bulgaria, 1997* (00.53 mins)

Odilya Yankova: My experience of video before the *Crossing Over* workshop was limited. My approach to modern art started with a short course in conceptual art at the Art Akademie in Budapest in 1993 where I was studying sculpture. This was only a short period after the big change which we all had to get through. It was a time of confusion for me because my point of view was completely disordered and my values were changing fast. Before this period we had a very

defined area of art and were able act within it and then everything changed. And it was very strange because there were many things existing simultaneously which we didn't know about - a very big area of artistic life - and at once this came to us and we had to learn to live with it and to make our art with it and to learn new terms, and a new way of living. Conceptual art was very comfortable for me because its essence really closed the philosophy which is basic human knowledge so it could be transformed into any situation. I think it was a good start. I always had this desire to come closer to the moving image, the moving reality. So to me the cinema was something very close to me and at once I understood that I could stay an artist and make movies at the same time. So video art was a saving. I was happy that I changed to explore these things more.

The first thing I made was a video documentation as this was more clear to me as it was based on facts just transformed into the moving media. After that I started thinking how I could express a concept using these ways of expression. So the second thing I made was a ten minute video without sound, a performance in video. That was how I first appeared in front of the camera.

After that I dared to take the camera in my own hands and tried to advance the other point of view, the point of the viewer. The world consists not only of two sides but even more. Making video gave me more possibility to change my place. When you can easily move your point of view it can be moving to any topic, you learn to be flexible. *I, RNG* is based on a concept. The world goes on about the problem of identity which is a very basic problem for me. An internal problem. Every person born in Eastern Europe has to cope with this change and this is well known. I've never been into the political side of things so to me the problem of identity was always very personal and I tried somehow to enlarge it and this is how I came to the philosophical understanding of identity. The title is an abbreviation of the computer term, random number generation and this film puts the question of difference between our desire to be something that we wish and the facts of outer reality, the facts of our bodies and our minds as the medium of our person because actually we live first inside our bodies and our brains and then we live inside the world. These are two spheres in communication all the time but it is not a simple process.

I chose about 20-25 people I know and shot their faces turning around and at the end of the sequence I shot my own face because you always have to find a point to stop. It's easy for everyone to find the end point inside themselves. There is the area where you put all your questions inside your head. The possibility that others are within you is implied but the sequence tells you I might be anyone and everyone but I'm not a separate different thing, why do I have to be?



Branka Milicic-Davic *Dream Yugoslavia*, 1997
(3.53mins)

**Branka Milicic-Davic interview
about her film *Dream Yugoslavia*,
1997 (3.53mins)**

Branka Milicic-Davic: This was my first video and I made it from film I shot with my performance group, Group Baza. I actually planned to make a long documentary of the performance we did last year which dealt with the situation in Yugoslavia on two levels : 1) how a person meets their own limits in work and in communication and 2) how a person feels about the borders around the

country or society in which they live. As you realised in the video we are dealing with the body, no words are spoken, neither in the video nor in the performance. I used the sound of my own breathing as the only possible sound. I had quite a lot of material but I just decided to make a short film, partly because of time and partly because I wanted to make a dream/nightmare where you cannot realise quite what is going on. **Katy Deepwell: The people appear as if they are asleep because of the breathing sound but as the camera slowly moves around the images turn into what they are dreaming about and the piece takes on a very dark atmosphere of a nightmare.**

Branka Milicic-Davic : The conception is done in such a way that you cannot realise whether this is a dream or a reality. My personal experience in the last few years living in Yugoslavia is that you cannot realise it as a bad dream or as a reality. You just cannot understand why just simple things cannot be realised and you cannot find any reason for this. Everything is just somehow surrealistic. The film captures this and is also surrealistic. There is nothing happening in the film, but everything is happening at the same time. You never see the whole body. Sometimes you do not even recognise parts of the body. It's just a kind of colour. You cannot see which is male or which is female. There is also an attempt to show what you see or realise in a performance - in the performance I shot, I am on the floor and I see it from another perspective to the audience. I see things which the audience cannot see -sweating - small pieces of the body which maybe do not tell much to the audience but it's like when you see your friends or someone in front of you, you realise small things which tell you something about the person and that's what I like.

Katy Deepwell: There is a poignant moment in the film where a bandaged arm drops against a larger mass of body. The images appear like an adult and child.

Branka Milicic-Davic : No, there is no child but its interesting you see it. Maybe its unconscious but I never planned it that way. The performance '4', which is what was filmed, played at several international festivals. 4 is a symbol of women's energy and at the same time the four walls of a cage/room. The fifth wall which you cannot see is the ceiling - it is that which you are trying to reach your whole life, reaching higher and higher.



Ulrike Ettinger *Elena Stanciucu: Verusch eine Portrait Germany, 1997 (17 mins)*.

Ulrike Ettinger Elena Stanciucu: Verusch eine Portrait Germany, 1997 (17 mins). Extracts from an interview with Katy Deepwell at Ostranenie after viewing the film

Ulrike Ettinger: This is my first work in video where I tried to make a documentary. My other videos have been completely different in that I knew what I wanted to do before I made them. This video has the subtitle 'An Attempt of a Portrait' and during the making of the work I tried to find out what would be my vision and how I could realise it.

I was impressed by Elena Stanciucu as a subject because of her work as a weaver, and her attempt to use techniques and ideas of folk art which were starting to disappear. It seemed to me she lived a good life with this passion. She made a lot of work and she found a way to combine this with her family and her work in the village where she lived in Romania. The work became part of her life.

Elena Stanciucu died three years before I decided to make the film but I didn't know this when I went to the village to make the film. I decided to try and show the situation as it is and the things which are still there in the way they are. I grew up in a big town in Romania and there are a lot of things about life in the village which are closed to me and I look at them with completely different eyes. What I tried to do was to find a way to get the people watching this film to gain an approach but always with the question: is it possible to know this person and place by film and by images like this with a video camera? So I decided to show the places in the village where she would have been, some of her house, photos which offer information about her and a context for her growing up. The comments on the back of photos are the only language offered in the film. There

are a lot of details about her life and what was important to her.

Part of her family in the village keeps all her things in boxes and they brought them out specially for me and for the camera. There are no museums or collections for this work. People don't trust the collections of the Romanian state and have had bad experiences with them so they want to keep these pieces even though they have no possibility to show them. They know they are valuable. In their everyday life, they have so completely different problems but they keep the work with care.

My other work has been different to this kind of documentary. In my next project, I want to put a monitor in a shop window of a travel agent. I am asking a lot of people through the net to describe in words their place of birth and will add a text naming the town, place, country. It will be just text passing on the monitor, no sound. This could be said to be another approach to autobiography. The place of birth is always something very connected with your sense of self. I am again exploring whether or not it is possible to show meaning fully using a different method of presentation, the texts on a monitor.

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