

Dina Iordanova, Review of Murtic, Dino, *Post-Yugoslav Cinema: Toward a Cosmopolitan Imaging*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2015. *Studies in European Cinema* (Taylor and Francis), Vol. 13, October.

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**Dino Murtic, *Post-Yugoslav Cinema: Towards a Cosmopolitan Imaging*, PalgraveMacMillan, 2015, 207 pages.**

Dino Murtic's book is not precisely a 'ground-breaking study of how cinema articulates the turbulent process of political and cultural changes in societies traumatised by war,' as Douglass Kellner claims in his endorsement at the book's back cover. More than half of the 'ground' that the book is supposedly 'breaking' has been extensively broken into, by writers such as Svetlana Slapsak, Pavle Levi, Slavoj Zizek, and a few more, including myself. It would be more correct, therefore, to describe the book as a study that builds on the solid ground established by others. And indeed, the author himself shows he is quite conscious of the true position of his contribution, as evident from the acknowledgments. I should immediately elaborate that whilst I disagree with the 'ground-breaking' qualification I do not mean to diminish the importance of Murtic's contribution – I truly liked *Post-Yugoslav Cinema*; I have been recommending it to others, and intend to recommend it in this short review as well.

Titles are often decided upon by the publishers, and I suspect this may have been the case here as I find it highly unlikely that the author would have described the project as 'Post-Yugoslav' only. This is not a book about Post-Yugoslav cinema –

if it were, it would have needed to provide an overview of the dissolution of the once integrated Yugoslav film industry as well as survey scores of films that were made in the past twenty years across the newly minted countries of the region. But this is not the ambition here. Instead, this study is a solid investigation on how some of the most important classical texts of Yugoslav cinema from the past – such as Zelimir Zilnik's classic *Early Works (Rani radovi, 1969)* and Slobodan Sijan's magisterial *Who Is Singing Out There (Ko to tamo peva, 1980)* -- and several more recent ones, have shaped the national discourse in Yugoslavia. The book does not provide a survey (this is not its intention) and only covers a few of the films that reflect on the 'post-Yugoslav' issues, such as trauma or rampant nationalism. But these are finely selected – examples include *Ordinary People (2009)*, *Grbavica (2006)*, or *Buick Riviera (2008)* -- and discussed in a way that is persuasive and comprehensive.

Personal writing oneself in. Murtic goes at length in providing historical and contextualising political background before introducing any films. Once the films are introduced, it is not only their intended impact but much more the reception they received that is in the focus of attention. Thus, the contextualisation that is provided is extensive and often extremely useful. This is the way, in my opinion, one should write about films from smaller cinematic traditions that most readers are not likely to be well familiar with. It is essential to not only say what the film is about and praise its cinematographic or narrative achievements, but to show what this film does in the concrete context where it is created and released. In that respect, framing films through background and reception, the book provides excellent contextualisation. This is precisely the type of 'contextual analysis' I

have spoken in favour of over the years (e.g. in the introduction to my book *Cinema of Flames: Balkan, Film Culture, and the Media*, 2001), an analysis that goes far beyond traditional textual analysis which is simply insufficient in such cases.

I also like the fact that Murtic does not try to remove himself and hide behind some supposed lofty objectivity, but writes himself into the investigation and does not hesitate to express his own views and passions. His humanist approach is particularly praiseworthy in regard to the chapters dedicated to the representations of women and Romanians. In each case he spends extensive part of the chapter on setting up the context, and then introduces and discusses only a select handful of films that are well selected for representativeness.

The author dedicates an extensive discussion to 'the case Kusturica', and indeed this is something that is worth spending time on (I myself have revisited Kusturica's case at least on four occasions throughout my career, and have been tempted to do so on many more – and this would be more or less the case of whoever has ever been tempted to make utterings on the subject of post-Yugoslav-related cinematic matters). It is evident that Murtic harbours anger towards the director whose absurd and deplorable transformation from a provincial Sarajevan enfant terrible into an arrogant maverick with particular taste for nationalistic excess, is an endless source of marvel for almost any cinephile from the region of former Yugoslavia. As I have dropped my interest and have not followed Kusturica's flamboyant displays in recent years, I was intrigued to read the updates on his exploits. Yet I do not think that the book is

bringing about any radically new insights into the character of this director. It just provides an update to the director's goings-on and confirms the sad new lows he has descended to.

Methodologically, *Post-Yugoslav Cinema* is a good exercise in applying Douglas Kellner's 'diagnostic critique,' in the context of which, in Murtic's words, requires that 'the interpretation of a particular film will benefit from contextual reading while, at the same time, a film narrative adds another dimension to particular events from the past.' (p. 176) In such 'double-vision', films of importance themselves come to function as 'an additional referential point' (p. 177).

I could not agree more. Douglas Kellner may not have been familiar with the other scholarship on matters related to Yugoslav and Balkan cinema, with which Murtic's work has significant overlaps. But Kellner has done well to encourage this writing and to assist in its publications. Thus, I highly recommend *Post-Yugoslav Cinema*, for those who can afford to buy it at £53.95 (or \$95)

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