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## THE SPACE BETWEEN IMAGE AND MUSIC IN THE FILM *WITHOUT WORDS*

**Abstract:** This paper examines the relationship between music and image in the experimental film *Without Words* directed by Miloš Radivojević (1972). The interaction of music, through Kornelije Kovač's improvisation and musical theme, silence, through the absence of noise, speech and sound design, and image, as an experimental, non-narrative form, provides fertile ground for analysis: that of each individual element's effect on the viewer, as well as of their joint, interdependent creation, which conveys a strong impression. This analysis focuses on the process of constructing the music score through music improvisation, and the effective use of the musical theme in this film, as well as its multi conventional role within a non-conventional film system.

**Keywords:** Kornelije Kovač, Miloš Radivojević, experimental film, *Without Words*

The oeuvre of Yugoslav composer Kornelije Kovač (1942–2022), whose work marked the artistic and cultural scene in Yugoslavia in the second half of the 20th century, considering its size and variety, speaks of a musical artist with great ambitions and inner strivings. Concurrent with his successful career as a composer of popular music, with an entire musical legacy of original compositions, Kovač garnered acclaim as a film composer, leaving a significant mark in the field of film music. He composed music scores for more than fifty Yugoslav and Serbian feature films and TV shows, in the period between 1968 and 2006.

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As a film music composer, Kovač explores the film-narrative system, experiments with its principles and limitations, but most of all studies the various ways in which music creates meaning within an audio-visual context. Using various techniques, styles, instruments and practices, he creates an authentic sound and music score. The familiarity and direct and discreet identification of Kovač's melody, in popular, as well as instrumental and applied music, survives as a defining characteristic of Kovač's entire musical opus, and the composer uses it with equal efficiency in all areas of his music activity, relying on its direct communication with the listener/viewer. A musical theme, as a conventional musical phenomenon, helps the composer dissect, anchor and define meaning in both mainstream and alternative film. It remains Kovač's basic building block, always conveying something personal, different, and yet so familiar, both in narrative film, and one that is non-narrative in its construction, like the alternative film directed by Miloš Miša Radivojević, *Without Words*. Kovač composed the music score for this film in 1972 and received the Golden Arena that very year at the Pula Film Festival.

This paper will distance itself from the usual, established view of one of three basic individual areas of the audio-visual system (speech, sound, music) and will focus on the co-dependent relationship of all three elements in the abovementioned film. The interaction of music, through Kovač's improvisation and musical theme, silence, through the absence of noise, speech and sound design, and image, as an experimental, non-narrative form, provides fertile ground for analysis: that of each individual element's effect on the viewer, as well as of their joint, interdependent creation, which conveys a strong impression. This analysis focuses on the process of constructing the music score through music improvisation, and the effective use of the musical theme in the experimental film *Without Words*, as well as its multi-conventional role within a non-conventional film system.

The film *Without Words* is an "almost unique work within the Yugoslav cinematography of its time",<sup>1</sup> according to the film critic Marijan Krivak. The film, one of Radivojević's earlier works, deals with the topic of existentialism, relying heavily on the "man against the world" idea, and man's search for meaning. The early films of this director (*Bees in the Bonnet*, *Without Words*,

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<sup>1</sup> Marijan Krivak, "(Film) Bez (reči) – umjetnička vježba ili koherentan iskaz?", *Zapis – bilten Hrvatskog filmskog saveza*, 73, 2012. [http://www.hfs.hr/nakladnistvo\\_zapis\\_detail.aspx?sif\\_clanci=34049](http://www.hfs.hr/nakladnistvo_zapis_detail.aspx?sif_clanci=34049)

*The Will*) all fall under the category of alternative, experimental films. When exploring the term "avant-garde film", Ivana Kronja implies the search for new, expressive forms of film, and characterizes it as elitist, personal, and strictly connected to the concept of experimental, alternative film.<sup>2</sup> Radivojević opposes the mainstream as well as the accepted and established moral and cultural codes of the society and time in which he creates, and that is the main reason his first movies could be perceived as avant-garde, alternative, experimental. Božidar Zečević's definition of alternative film conveys an idea of a "particular way of expression, one that constantly places itself in opposition to the governing cultural codes, i.e. belongs to the type of awareness and consciousness that opposes that culture and does not accept it".<sup>3</sup> Distancing itself from the traditional comprehension of film, the alternative film expression represents a clear "poetic-aesthetic orientation of the author towards the research of new spaces in their own film expression and sensibility".<sup>4</sup> All these definitions of the alternative within the film system indicate the movement of the artists' individual strivings towards the new, unexplored and free. The authors of alternative film, like Radivojević, are seekers of the truth, which they strip to the bone, brutally and uncompromisingly, by using their intimate, non-coded language, and by testing their own limits and abilities.

This is precisely why the notion of alternative in film cannot be reduced to a couple of new expressions by a director, different author philosophies and their relationship with the mainstream. The wide spectrum of the alternative in film includes several different subtypes, according to the aesthetic, structural-value classification of Hrvoje Turković.<sup>56</sup> Radivojević's creation *Without Words* plays unintentionally with practices and ideas of several sub-

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<sup>2</sup> Ivana Kronja, "Ka definiciji avangardnog filma", *Zbornik radova Fakulteta dramskih umetnosti*, 11-12, 2007, 108-109.

<sup>3</sup> Božidar Zečević, "Serbian Avant-Garde and Alternative Cinema", in: Miodrag Milošević (Ed.), *Alternative Film/Video 2016/2017. Discussion / Art Movements / Subversion*, Beograd, Akademski filmski centar, Dom kulture "Studentski grad", 2018, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Miroslav Bata Petrović, *Alternativni film u Beogradu od 1950. do 1990. godine*, Beograd, Arhiv alternativnog filma i videa Doma kulture Studentski grad, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Hrvoje Turković, "Što je eksperimentalni (avangardni, alternativni) film", *Zapis – bilten Hrvatskog filmskog saveza*, 38, 2002. [http://www.hfs.hr/nakladnistvo\\_zapis\\_detail.aspx?sif\\_clanci=192](http://www.hfs.hr/nakladnistvo_zapis_detail.aspx?sif_clanci=192)

<sup>6</sup> The aesthetic classification of alternative film by Hrvoje Turković implies the division into the following categories: surrealist or poetic film, avant-garde documentary, underground film, abstract film, automatic film, conceptualistic film, and expanded film.

types of Turković's categorisation, binding together the poetical, non-narrative construct, documentarism, performance and body art. It also deals with subversive topics, that oppose what is morally and culturally acceptable. The disturbing radical approach to taboos used by Radivojević in his film, focuses on the questions to which the director does not offer any answers, but demands them from the active, engaged, and never static viewer. However, Radivojević did not wish to create "some form of conceptualism, nor avant-garde, but a film from one's own point of view. The idea was not to make a classical nor an alternative film, but a space between image and music in which an identity of a man would be born, based on his feelings that can be seen in the image and heard in the music... a protagonist without words."<sup>7</sup>

A continuous cry for freedom and the undisturbed and courageous opposition to the established, that come naturally to this author, represent Radivojević's personal film manifesto, clearly shaped in his first independent cinematographic works. A creator and a prolific director-author, Radivojević made his first film at the age of thirty (*Bees in the Bonnet*), and this film marked the beginning of a long-term collaboration with the composer, Kornelije Kovač, with whom he continued working on most of his feature and TV films. Kovač started working on the film *Without Words*, after already partnering with several important Yugoslav directors: Mirza Idrizović, Zoran Čalić, Predrag Golubović, Bata Čengić, Branko Gapo, and again, Miša Radivojević.

*Without Words* is constructed as a series of 26 tableaux, enhanced with music and silence. As the film title implies, the viewer remains denied the basic element of narration – speech. This film, with its every frame and idea, lack of narrative, the causal and logical, bravely balances between pure improvisation and a creative exploration of the intimate. The protagonist of the film is played by the Yugoslav and Serbian actor Dragan Nikolić, who, along with the music, is the only constant and connective tissue of this, always unstable, structure. By using his role in the film, the actor takes the viewer through various psychological states; he does not allow rest or pause, but constantly sets new challenges and demands. The scenes alternate, without any obvious narrative coherence, presenting an individual character in various spiritual, emotional and mental conditions, performing various actions. The protagonist prepares his meals, eats, smokes cigarettes, drinks heavily,

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<sup>7</sup> Aleksandra Kovač, the conversation with the director Miša Radivojević was held and recorded on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2023 in Belgrade.

plays with a monkey, is harassed by a bully in the street, faces a firing squad, vomits intensely, has sexual intercourse with a doll, tries to break out of his own skin... The director's goal was to challenge the actor in every scene, so he could convey the essence of life and the world around him, as Radivojević imagined it in 1972. "What is the hero of that time like? He drinks heavily, does dumb things, but he also stirs up an uprising, raises his voice, tries to organise a mutiny, and loses his life in these attempts."<sup>8</sup> It is interesting that the very same year, after several showings (Pula Festival, Dom Omladine), the film was black-listed, due to its liberal ideas, and therefore banned.

Krivak claims that Miša Radivojević's film encompasses "the interweaving of all three modes of film" and that it is "at the same time a documentary, narrative fiction and experimental film", with prevailing meta-film elements.<sup>9</sup> Such a film classification would require the composer to create music that can reconcile these totally different film categories, perform all the roles and functions that are predetermined by its position within the film system, and communicate with the viewer, by means of a wide spectrum of musical conventions and events. However, most importantly, the music would have to naturally bind itself to the world of experimental film, in which there are no rules of fiction and narration, but those of total, undisturbed freedom of expression and creation. Kovač attempts to respond to the challenge, by using improvisation as a composing method, as well as experimenting with conventional methods in an unconventional way. The relationship between music and image in this film, and its analysis, are directly conditioned by the author's expression, visual dramaturgy, structure and content of the film. But "what could the role of music be in aesthetic environments far removed from those formed in mainstream films?"<sup>10</sup> The question of music and its role in alternative film is a question of the relationship between two strong expressions, having shaken off the shackles of conventionality. The very history of analysis of sound-image relationship presents a development of the theoretical thought, studied by many film music theoreticians. Kathryn Kalinak emphasizes several important schools of thought regarding sound, in relation to the image.<sup>11</sup> The first scholars that wrote about this topic considered sound

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Marijan Krivak, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Holly Rogers, "Introduction", in: Holly Rogers and Jeremy Barham (Ed.), *The Music and Sound of Experimental Film*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2017, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Kathryn Kalinak, *Film Music: A Very Short Introduction*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010.

subordinate to the image. The famous *Statement on Sound Film*, signed by Soviet filmmakers Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov in 1928,<sup>12</sup> classified film sound by whether it moved parallel or in counterpoint to the image.<sup>13</sup> Siegfried Kracauer additionally establishes the theory of parallelism and counterpoint,<sup>14</sup> which survived to this day, although some film music theoreticians find it flawed.

Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, in their revolutionary book *Composing for the Films*, claim that image and sound are two completely different and separate forms of expression, and that their relationship cannot be defined by certain types of movements.<sup>15</sup> In addition, Kalinak states that, by positioning music next to the image and discussing the type of their joint movements, we assume that the image, in itself, is a holder of meaning. She claims that the image is amorphous and can offer many different meanings, while the music is the one that actually strengthens and consolidates one of these many interpretations. “Music pins down the image track.”<sup>16</sup> Claudia Gorbman states that “music anchors the image in meaning”<sup>17</sup> by expressing moods and connotations, that, together with the image and other elements, help the viewer understand the narrative. The question is: can the music anchor the image only if the image is conventional and determined by the rules of mainstream films? Can music convey meaning if there are no strict rules of narration? Is the music in an alternative film a priori alternative itself, as it is a part of an unconventional system where determined rules of mainstream film do not apply?

Kovač's music score for the film *Without Words* can provide some answers. On the one hand, in certain scenes, the music faithfully, almost in perfect synchronicity with the image, conveys certain meanings, atmospheres and ideas. On the other hand, in others, it becomes a means of contrast, that

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<sup>12</sup> The “Report” was published for the first time in the Leningrad magazine *Здизн Искусства* on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1928.

<sup>13</sup> The parallel movement implied that sound enhances and emphasizes the meaning of the image, and that the counterpoint movement, counteracts it.

<sup>14</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1960, 139–144.

<sup>15</sup> Theodor Adorno, Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films*, New York, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Kathryn Kalinak, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*, Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press; London, BFI Publishing, 1987.

negates the image, contradicting it uncompromisingly and directly. A more detailed analysis of this work will show that Kovač's music, by itself, separated from Radivojević's image, represents a combination of the conventional and the experimental, the musical theme and the improvised music, the music of coincidence. Kovač mostly improvised and composed his music while watching the film for the first time, in the recording studio of "Dom inženjera i tehničara" in Belgrade, and recorded it directly on tape, during one of three days the director and composer spent together. What little time he had before entering the studio, while reading the screenplay, Kovač used to compose the two main musical themes, the only ones that were not improvised on the spot.

The decision that the film would not contain any synchronous noise was due to a limited budget, as well as to the director's wish. The music was the key to understanding the image, but the crucial task of the composer was to introduce something Radivojević calls, "the murmur of the soul".<sup>18</sup> In order to enter the intimate world of the protagonist, Kovač uses various instruments, which were within his reach in the studio at any given moment. The two basic instruments that define the score are a Rhodes electric piano and a Hammond organ, with an occasional appearance of the harpsichord. Curious wind instruments, the most characteristic ones being the harmonica, the Indian flutes in F and in E, and the Don Partridge flutes, paint certain scenes with specific colour, rhythm and melody. Kovač uses exposed piano strings, over which he drags his fingers and pieces of paper, creating a haunting soundscape. The magnetic tape is played alternately at slower and faster speed, and sometimes even backwards. Congas, wooden percussion, as well as the composer's body, cheeks, hands and mouth, become the means for a direct transmission of the protagonist's anxiety, rage, discomfort and excitement. Kovač uses everything within his immediate reach, limited by the lack of space, time, and money, but not ideas. In that segment, the composer takes over the baton and plays with harmonies, rhythms and melody, that persist in all forms of his expression, as diatonic, recognizable, and created in accordance to the compositional rules of popular, rock, jazz, blues, soul and progressive music. Every tableau is different, with music only occasionally connecting two or more images. Most often, an individual image is connected to a separate musical event. Kovač's understanding of the film's idea and philosophy are reflected in every music improvisation, which sounds

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<sup>18</sup> Aleksandra Kovač, op. cit.

more like a composed musical event, elaborated and prepared in advance, than a composition created and performed in real time.

The music of the film *Without Words* plays an important role in Radivojević's philosophic experiment, and creates a strong impression on the viewer. The reason for this lies in the fact that the only sound element that affects our senses and perception of what we see on the screen, is actually, music. Kovač guides us through a labyrinth of musical themes, atmospheres, voices, styles, rhythms and instruments that take turns in transporting us into the inner world of the protagonist. His music controls and manipulates the viewers perception of the image, by using a musically understandable and easily recognizable language. Adorno and Eisler see film music as a basic connective tissue, a cement that unifies elements that are, otherwise, incompatible and contrary: the mechanical product and the viewer.<sup>19</sup> Let us not forget that film is still a technical product as well as an artistic one, composed of frames that take fast turns, an entity in constant danger of disintegration.<sup>20</sup> Music creates an impression of continuity and unity, by using a unique musical idea, that connects the entire film. Kovač uses music to merge heterogeneous images into one whole, by using and repeating certain instruments, colours and musical themes.

The music in this film is treated similarly to one in a silent film, when its projections were accompanied by a pianist, playing music of different moods and styles or just improvising on the piano. Music is the most important element that helps us slide into fiction more easily. We forget that a film is a technical product, and willingly transition into this fictional new world, while being transformed into a lulled, hypnotised subject.<sup>21</sup> When there is no music in the film, it is harder for us to achieve a suspension of disbelief and attempt a jump from reality into fiction, and vice versa. We require music as the one essential element that helps us believe the unbelievable. Radivojević could have chosen an entirely different approach to the sound, enriching the film with murmurs and noise, eliminating the music completely. However, this film would then convey a different message, and the viewer would have the impression of a naked and brutal reality, that might be too raw, radical and disturbing. The director tries to soften the blow to the viewer, undoubt-

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<sup>19</sup> Theodor Adorno, Hanns Eisler, op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> Roy M. Prendergast, *Film Music: A Neglected Art*, New York, London, W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1992.

<sup>21</sup> Claudia Gorbman, op. cit.

edly stricken by this film, by using music. The viewer is left at the mercy of Kovač's music score which serves as a guide to a better understanding of the protagonist's identity and emotions, and a reminder that this is fiction, after all. Musical silence occurs rarely and with no significance to the image track. Kovač uses it as a rest stop, either for himself or for the viewer, and thus with each new appearance, the music has an even bigger and stronger influence. With its absence of murmurs and sounds of real life, this film starts to feel like a dream, a hallucination, abandoning the sphere of the realistic and turning towards the internal, towards the emotional, intimate world of the protagonist. We witness the direct transmission of the protagonist's internal anxiety, and drown with him, gasping for air, deeper and deeper into the dark waters of his turmoil, guided by each new musical and visual event.

The film begins with title credits that transform into the first scene, named "Fingers Dancing Across a Woman's Leg". The protagonist (Dragan Nikolić) is on the train with a woman (Dunja Lango), sitting opposite him in the train compartment, and he starts to drag his fingers over her leg. He takes off her shoe and touches her in fascination, while she sits disinterested, without any reaction. The camera is hand held, with a subtle movement that simulates the movement of the train. The dimmed light hued with red tones, and two people, one engaged and excited, and the other static and non-reactive, offer Kovač the freedom to create an authentic musical sequence. The title credits and the first scene of the film are accompanied by a combination of rhythmical patterns that the composer performs with his own voice, playing with the word *Bez* (without) and the consonant *M*, as well as foot stomps. Kovač pronounces/sings the letters *B*, *E*, *Z*, in a melodic pattern, but also freely, without any order, through his teeth, yelling in exaltation, mumbling, changing the intonation and timbre. The foot stomps that alternate with the voice, in rhythmical motifs, create the impression of ritualism, paganism and folklore. The first scene emphasizes and suggests a special relationship between music and image, one that is interdependent and complementary. Without violating the integrity of the other, these two expressions outline the joint idea, in equal measure.

The next scene breaks the rhythm and the structure, and brings a total contrast, both cinematographic and musical, featuring the protagonist, sitting on the floor in a suit, with a bow tie, surrounded by bottles of liquor, drinking heavily, talking, laughing and yelling in silence. He is a sad clown, a jester, the main character of a silent film, and makes us laugh with his sadness and restlessness. The music of this scene, directly, without reluctance,

borrowed the musical techniques from the circus, the music hall, the vaudeville and the silent comedies of Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin. Kovač creates a melody with a harmonic accompaniment, that has recognisable and easily memorised motifs, sometimes played in sequence on a Rhodes electric piano. The “mickey mousing” technique<sup>22</sup> is used to remind us of the first silent films. Mervyn Cooke speaks of the “illustrative musical effects synchronised with specific events in the film’s physical action”<sup>23</sup> when he defines this technique and reminds us of the extended use this, backing of the image with the music, had in Walt Disney’s animated feature films.

The “Suicide” scene is among the most impressive ones in the entire film, because Dragan Nikolić’s acting is so convincing, that for a moment we forget that it is a film we’re watching, and not a disturbing reality. The only time we get a chance to hear sounds and murmurs of the diegesis is at the beginning of this remarkable scene. Our protagonist lights a cigarette and then attempts to commit suicide, with an entire arsenal of various weapons. The knife and the razor are real, and the unease that this scene provokes in the viewer is equally credible. This type of scene in a mainstream film would be accompanied with music, filled with musical conventions for fear and suspense, which mainstream film managed to consolidate and imprint in the viewer’s subconscious during its history of development. However, here, within the framework determined by Radivojević and Kovač, everything is possible and allowed. The attempted suicide is accompanied by a lyrical, melancholic, lush, full-blooded musical theme, that, by melody, harmony and style belongs more to Kovač’s rock and jazz compositions, than to an alternative film. This palpable contrast between the disturbing image of a man who attempts the unthinkable, and the consoling, slightly utopian melody, reflects the strength of both artists’ ideas and their freedom of expression.

The “Suicide” theme is one of the two main musical themes of the film. It will appear several times more, in the scenes “Leeches”, “Vomiting”, “Pit” and “Disinfection”, in which our protagonist takes live leeches from a bowl of water and lays them directly onto his naked chest, vomits intensely, falls into a pit in which he is buried alive, and is disinfected naked in a prison cell. This musical theme becomes a symbol of the protagonist’s suffering, anxiety, de-

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<sup>22</sup> The Mickey Mousing technique marked the first silent films, as well as Walt Disney’s cartoons.

<sup>23</sup> Mervyn Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

struction and self-destruction. The second theme, named "Women"<sup>24</sup> by the composer himself, plays the role of a leitmotif, which accompanies the protagonist's love interests and his relationships with women, as well as with a plastic doll. Besides several scenes that portray his various liaisons with various women (actresses Neda Arnerić, Dušica Žegarac, Branka Matic, Snežana Lipkowska), the scene that explores the relationship between the protagonist and a plastic doll features the most complex and substantial execution of the music theme. Using this gradation - from the developing and repeating motifs, to the music theme in its full form - Kovač highlights the protagonist's inability to obtain a real relationship with women in his life. For him, love is born only in a relationship with someone who is not real, that cannot love him back.

The functionality of the musical theme and its role in narrative film are well known. The theme, based on the Wagnerian principles of motif and leitmotif, accompanies the appearance of a certain person, place, situation or emotion.<sup>25</sup> When we transfer the theme from pure instrumental music, where it represents an essential idea, to film music, the theme becomes an important sound element that is repeated.<sup>26</sup> Irena Paulus mentions that the theme can be a melody, but also a melodic or rhythmical fragment, as well as a harmonic progression, and that the principle of repeating is the most important one for the use of a theme in film music.<sup>27</sup> Although film music borrows the idea of leitmotif from Richard Wagner, there is a significant difference in the manner of use. James Buhler mentions that Wagner's leitmotifs bring meaning and resist it at the same time, because film music eliminates the mythical from the leitmotif and does not question it, while Wagner uses it to convey the meaning and revive the linguistic nature of music. The leitmotif is rarely allowed to stop or slow down the course of the film, in order to express its essence, while Wagner makes sure it has the space and time to convey meaning.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The musical synopsis written by Kornelije Kovač during his work on the film *Without Words* is owned by the author of this paper.

<sup>25</sup> Claudia Gorbman, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> James Buhler, David Neumeyer, Rob Deemer, *Hearing the Movies*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, 196.

<sup>27</sup> Irena Paulus, *Teorija filmske glazbe, kroz teoriju filmskog zvuka*, Zagreb, Hrvatski filmski savez, 2012, 124.

<sup>28</sup> James Buhler, "Star Wars, Music, and Myth", in: James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, David Neumeyer (Eds), *Music and Cinema*, Hanover, Wesleyan University Press, 2000, 41-42.

Kovač treats the musical theme in this film with respect, and allows it time to communicate with the viewer, directly and without disruption. It develops, has variations, appears as both leitmotif and a mere hint, but whatever form it appears in, Kovač uses it as a tool of association and identification, helping the viewer understand, but most of all, feel everything the protagonist is feeling. The “Suicide” theme is composed as a song, with a distinct melodic part, moving sequentially, while the form and structure are reminiscent of Western Europe’s 1970’s progressive rock music. This is supported by the fact that Kovač developed this theme a couple of years later, as a popular music track, in the early 1980s, during his life in Great Britain. The song was completed with an added lead vocal (singer Linda Jardin), an arrangement played by British musicians, and lyrics in English. Kovač’s other theme in the film “Women”, is equally melodious, catchy and is stylistically a French chanson, a type of French popular music, famous in the 1950s and 1960s.

“Suicide” appears after the static frame of the protagonist exercising, and the music continuously transforms from one scene to the other. Radivojević believed that Kovač would manage to find common ground between musical continuity, on the one hand, and fragmentary music, on the other, “by using his power of imagination, knowledge, but mostly his ability to improvise”. The director didn’t strive for continuity, in a musical sense. “The visual dramaturgy of this film is such that we are seeing arranged images. But if we do the same with music, the mechanism will be visible, and that does not work. The task was to imagine every single image, and that meant that improvisation was necessary. Sometimes the music would embellish only one image, and other times it would connect several.”<sup>29</sup>

The exercise scene is accompanied by a baroque improvisation on the Hammond organ, in free tempo, and in the next one the viewer is reminded of the “Suicide” theme. The composer’s playfulness and the unrestrained and inspired leaps from one idea to the other (from Debussyan preluding in the shower scene, to the repetition of a newly introduced melodic motif in the “Self-kissing” scene, and the entirely new, contrasting music event in the scene in which the protagonist plays with a real monkey), speak of a composer comfortable with various musical styles.

The scene in which the protagonist prepares scrambled eggs and eats them is accompanied by a two-voice melody, played on the Indian flutes.

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<sup>29</sup> Aleksandra Kovač, *op. cit.*

Kovač paints his vision of Radivojević's idea with musical colours, but his painting never becomes dominant, blatant, with too many shadows, lines and shapes. Kovač's music is always enhancing the image.

"Man with the Monkey" made the biggest impression on the director while the music was being recorded. "The monkey sequence was long, and Kornelije was the intermediary between the man and the monkey. I was fascinated, because Kornelije improvised while fully sensing what was happening on the screen."<sup>30</sup> After a long improvisation on the electric piano, with the addition of a couple of percussion instruments, where music assumes a playful, somewhat circus-like character, but still with clear melodic outlines, the situation dramatically changes in the "Bully" scene. The composer emphasizes the similarity of the relationship between the man and the monkey, and the bully and the man. The bully harasses our protagonist in the street, and plays with him, just like the protagonist played with the monkey, treating him as a toy. Once again, Kovač turns to progressive rock, typical of the music he created with his band the *Korni grupa* – an opus that includes songs such as "Jedna žena" (One Woman) or "Put za istok" (The Road to the East).

Images accompanied by contrasting music, constantly alternate with those where the composer relies upon conventional music patterns, thus creating an expanse of expression.

"Execution" and "Wheat Field" are the scenes that follow. In the first, Kovač imitates the trumpet with his voice, using the fanfare motif from Hollywood war films, and in the second, he transitions to Bach-style prelude on the harpsichord, with a subsequent appearance of the organ. Such shifts from one style to the other, from one musical reality to the other, do not disturb the perception of the visual, but succeed in enhancing it.

In order to maintain the film's structure and unity, Kovač returns to themes, motifs and emotions. The reappearance of the opening theme "Without" serves as a respite for the viewer, but in this scene it seems like the protagonist is a part of the music itself, stomping his feet on the floor and moving to the beat of the music. But he does not hear it, it is not part of the diegesis, but the meta-diegesis instead, the part of the film space that vibrates between reality and fiction, and is a part of the protagonist's dreams and hallucinations.

"Women", a block made of several scenes, introduces a theme that makes a strong impression on the viewer with its simplicity, and could easily appear

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

in the love scene of a 1960's French movie. Again, Kovač uses the organ, electric piano and harpsichord, his most important allies in this soundtrack, in the following scenes, in portraying an intimate moment between lovers, the protagonist running in a field with women, the protagonist holding a child by its hand while running on a sand dune, and the image of a family sitting in the mud. The entire segment reflects the authentic ideas of directing, photography, editing, acting and music.

“Breaking Out of One’s Own Skin”, “Vomiting”, “Taxi”, “Intercourse with a Doll”, “Burial” and, in the end, “Disinfection”, represent a certain and designed progression towards the scene in which our protagonist, who lives, bites and feels, is sprayed and disinfected in a prison cell. The disinfection from life, freedom and love is accompanied by the “Suicide” theme, as a final reminder of the basic “man against the world” idea of the film. Kovač creates the gradation by using the main themes of the film, now well recognisable, but also their motifs and basic ideas.

It is certain that the relationship between music and image in the film “Without words” resembles a red hot ball that constantly emits the sparks of creativity, freedom and curiosity of the two artists, but, above all, of great interdependence. For the viewer, watching this film surely represents a wholly different experience than watching a mainstream film, and the relationship of the viewer with the music in the film assumes a completely new dimension. William Verrone believes that the reason for this is that in an avant-garde film nothing is clearly indicated and explained, like in a mainstream film, and thus our senses react in a totally different manner. A mainstream film uses the music to control and guide the viewer’s perception and manipulate their understanding of the story, plot, and outcome. An alternative film does not make it easier for the viewer, and makes them work hard in order to understand the film.<sup>31</sup>

Radivojević clearly demands total focus and attention from the viewer, but what makes the entire experience especially important is precisely the play of music and image, in which the music alternately confirms and refutes what the image implies. Kovač’s music takes the viewer on an exciting merry-go-round, often leaving them pensive and unsure of their perception of the image, thus creating a completely new audio-visual space, of which Radivojević speaks with enthusiasm.

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<sup>31</sup> William Verrone, *The Avant-Garde Feature Film: A Critical History*, North Carolina, McFarland & Company, 2011

“Kornelije used all his musical capacities, and I used all of the ones at my disposal, and together we created something new, something that exists only between sound and image.”<sup>32</sup> That space, where the two entirely different artistic expressions, music and image meet, becomes a new audio-visual universe. It is fully synchronised in some scenes, and appears in conflicting contrast in others, thus clearly explaining to the viewer that this film does not provide answers, but poses questions. It is this relationship between the music and the image, Kovač and Radivojević, that requires the viewer to observe this work as a personal film, and not an alternative or experimental one. No idea, however taboo or controversial, for the time it was generated in, is concealed. On the contrary, those ideas are featured and receive full attention, both from the director and the composer, marking their own space, image and sound.

The film *Without Words* remains under lock and key in the archives of the Yugoslav Film Archive, where the original copy was placed after being black listed in 1972. Just like many others, this film remains a testament of an era and a society which, on the one hand, allowed its artists the freedom of expression, and on the other, immediately condemned them and deprived them of that very freedom.

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<sup>32</sup> Aleksandra Kovač, op. cit.

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## Summary

Concurrent with his successful career as a composer of popular music, with an entire musical legacy of original compositions, Kornelije Kovač (1942–2022) garnered acclaim as a film composer, leaving a significant mark in the field of film music. He composed music scores for more than fifty Yugoslav and Serbian feature films and TV shows, in the period between 1968 and 2006.

As a film music composer, Kovač explores the film-narrative system, experiments with its principles and limitations, but most of all studies the various ways in which music creates meaning within an audio-visual context. A musical theme, as a conventional musical phenomenon, helps the composer dissect, anchor and define meaning in both mainstream and alternative film. It remains Kovač's basic building block, always conveying something personal, different, and yet so familiar, both in narrative film, and one that is non-narrative in its construction, like the alternative film directed by Miloš Miša Radivojević, *Without Words*. Kovač composed the music score for this film in 1972 and received the Golden Arena that very year at the Pula Film Festival.

Radivojević clearly demands total focus and attention from the viewer, but what makes the entire experience especially important is precisely the play of music and

image, in which the music alternately confirms and refutes what the image implies. Kovač's music takes the viewer on an exciting merry-go-round, often leaving them pensive and unsure of their perception of the image, thus creating a completely new audio-visual space. That space, where the two entirely different artistic expressions, music and image meet, becomes a new audio-visual universe. It is fully synchronised in some scenes, and appears in conflicting contrast in others, thus clearly explaining to the viewer that this film does not provide answers, but poses questions. It is this relationship between the music and the image, Kovač and Radivojević, that requires the viewer to observe this work as a personal film, and not an alternative or experimental one. No idea, however taboo or controversial, for the time it was generated in, is concealed. On the contrary, those ideas are featured and receive full attention, both from the director and the composer, marking their own space, image and sound.