

DOCU-FICTION MASTERCLASS WITH ZELIMIR ŽILNIK

August 19 - 26, 2018, Novi Sad, Serbia

The prize-winning, internationally acclaimed director Želimir Žilnik has had an illustrious career dedicated to making socially provocative and politically engaged films. Celebrated as one of initiators of the docudrama, Žilnik has, in film after film, demonstrated the extraordinary adaptability of the genre, with his uniquely critical take on social, political and economic realities. Over the course of a prolific career that includes more than fifty films—features, documentaries, shorts, television productions and series—he has mastered the techniques and the aesthetics of low-budget filmmaking.

This 8-day class examines the craft of docu-fiction film making and will feature engaging discussions with participants, daily screening programs and individual consultations with participants on their own projects. In eight 4 hour sessions Žilnik will get to the core of his approach to docu-fiction and share his insights and experience from five decades of filmmaking. The class is meant for filmmakers already working or for those wanting to cross over into docu-fiction.

In a mix of lecture-style, discussion and Q&A, 15 participants will have a unique opportunity to work with Žilnik in an intimate classroom environment, in his hometown Novi Sad. He will present his filmmaking methodology, the considerable range of techniques he's developed over the course of a career in works that deal with social engagement, comedy and explicit political criticism. Among the crucial areas likely to be covered: the pivotal role of research in developing fictional storylines from real-life materials, the potentials and the limitations of improvisation, how to stimulate the innate theatricality of the non-actor, how to mix actors and non-actors within a single production, how to develop the scripted vs. the unscripted elements in a narrative, how to work with a cinematographer in improvisatory situations.

Syllabus

Preparation for the Class:

View [Old School of Capitalism](#)

(vimeo.com link will be provided a week in advance of first session)

This docudrama is a particularly ambitious staging of the multiple points of contact and overlap between the fictive and the real.

Attempt, as a viewer, to find some of those contacts; the discussion in class will turn this attempt inside out in order to substantiate those crucial points in the docudrama from the point of view of the filmmaker in constructing the storyline.

Day 1: August 19, 2018

10 am – 2 pm : Session 1

A warm Welcome:

Then, a brief explanation of the overall structure of each day's class.

To that end, participants will introduce themselves to the other members of the class so as to provide an initial, concrete basis for active collaboration in the group and to begin to make best use of each individual participant's skills and experience.

Each class will highlight:

the genesis,

the development,

the themes,

and dramatic structures of a specific film (or films).

How so?

In each case, the emphasis will be on analyzing not the films themselves but the **construction, working methods, problem-solving, and constant decision-making** involved in producing the film at hand--in regard to the major issues and technical questions represented within or by the film.

2 pm – 3 pm Lunch (provided)

5 pm – 7 pm: Screening session 1 with Q&A.

Specific scenes from **Old School of Capitalism**, providing detailed analysis of the working methods involved in the film's representation of the status of the worker in a post-socialist society, from documentary research to the final edit.

Day 2: August 20, 2018

10 am – 2 pm : Session 2

The Kenedi Trilogy: minority representations.

The unexpected complexities of aesthetic and technical decisions and choices:

on the route from a documentary on the inadequate education of Roma children, through video letters and the project of self-representation of minorities on film, through the issues involved in the choice of a main actor/non-actor (and how that choice influenced the direction of the film),

through the involvement of the European Parliament as a political influence on the eventual shaping of the films and other more hidden political issues, through the circumstances of the films' reception.

Lunch break

5 pm – 7 pm: Screening session 2 with Q&A The Kenedi Trilogy

Day 3: August 21, 2018

10 am – 2 pm : Session 3

Discussion of construction and mapping of Logbook Serbistan (2015)

Among the topics developed during this class:

Receptivity to current issues of the migrant crisis in 2014 in Serbia.

The range of tactics deployed over time to allow the film to be financed.

The use of documentary as initial research for the feature film,

The conditions under which actual migrants portray versions of their own unfolding fates, under the pressures of everyday existence, in an unfamiliar country and an unfamiliar language.

What are the issues pertaining to these continued pressures? One key decision: to portray the migrants as subject not object, while the conditions and the landscape of Serbia, become the more unstable element. The subjects of the film, in particular the central figures, two African migrants, are presented as articulate and aware of the forces of contemporary history, far more than their Serbian 'hosts,' and are in near-constant difficult movement through the country, seen as a place to escape from, not to be comfortable living in. Visually and narratively, the film insists on a near-constant state of movement, of unrest, of irresolution, of displacement. The key: exploration of this development of the cinematographic capture of these conditions.

Lunch break

5 pm – 7 pm: Screening session 3 with Q&A

Day 4: August 22, 2018

10 am – 2 pm : Session 4

Presentation of **Brooklyn-Gusinje**

Importance of a specific historical moment to the conditions of a socially explorative docu-drama.

For instance, under the increasingly tense situation in 1987, when the socialist system began exhibiting many signs of disintegration, and the beginning of exploitation of national and ethnic differences by opportunist politicians.

This discussion will focus on the choice of Albanian minorities in a remote area of Serbia, as a vehicle to explore this subject.

Lunch break

5 pm – 7 pm: Screening session 4 with Q&A: Brooklyn- Gusinje.

Day 5: August 23, 2018

10 am – 2 pm : Session 5

Pirika on Film (Little Pioneers girl 40 years later) relationships with participants

Focus: The constraints and advantages of producing docudrama for television. Consideration of immediate screening, i.e. broadcast to as many as five million people in a single night.

Are there relevant conditions of self-censorship? Or is that a false or irrelevant question? If, for instance, one is filming textile workers under circumstances that resemble a prison gulag—and getting away with it—how could that be conceived as a product of censorship?

Lunch break

5 pm – 7 pm: Screening session 5 with Q&A

Day 6: August 24, 2018

10 am – 2 pm : Session 6

Presentation: **Fortress Europe** (2012)

Issue: How to represent the virtually unrepresentable.

When denied access to guarded facilities, under the closed borders of southern Europe, careful but direct in-person research led to wholly new opportunities—access to seasonal agricultural workers, to using Italian police (and their migrant wives and girlfriends) as participating actors in the project.

Lunch break

5 pm – 7 pm: Screening session 6 with Q&A

Day 7: August 25, 2018

10 am – 2 pm: Session 7

A presentation of Zilnik's new film **The Most Beautiful Country in the World**

To sidestep or overcome the perceived obstacles as revealed in the documentary research, a move into fiction became necessary. None of the acting non-actors are speaking directly from their own experiences. For instance, the aged non-actor portraying an Afghani who comes to Europe in search of his last remaining relative is in fact in life that is, a jujitsu instructor. What are the considerable effects of this alteration of the real in favor of a fiction?

Lunch break

5 pm – 7 pm: Screening session 7 with Q&A

Day 8: August 26, 2018

10 am – 2 pm: Session 8

Presentation of **Among the People: Life and Acting**.

A radical consideration of the overlaps between acting and action. How film and everyday life mutually affect each other, concentrating on an activist group in Belgrade, a group that also played crucial roles in Old School of Capitalism. How activist actors can use a film as a platform, both for the issues represented in the film and to advocate for the film itself.

Lunch break

5 pm – 7 pm: Screening session 8 with Q&A