

CIVIC

Crime scene

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What are the film schools producing? What is the taxpayers' money spent on? Where are the film-makers in our society, and where is the society in their movies?

After the life took us to different parts of the world, we met again. Two close school-time friends who surprisingly quickly recognised each other during those nineties, complemented each other in differences and built own paths through those daydreams which we revel in only until we have truly gotten to know the life out there.

Sixteen years later, again in the same city. The Montenegro Film Festival in the schedule, just a slice of it – we had no time for more...

Years of education in drama, politics, human rights, the media and other as well as the experiences we accumulated spontaneously begged the questions:

What are the film schools producing?

What is the taxpayers' money spent on?

Where are the film-makers in our society, and where is the society in their movies?

Even a quick sketch gathered on the basis of a few movies outlines clear signs by the road we should follow.

To keep up with events, let us focus on the Montenegrin omnibus of the graduating students' works: "Love, Scars". The immediate reaction is best described by the first sentence spoken out loud after the screening: "If they already made them, and even managed to graduate with them, why did they have to show them in public!?" At the academies which stick to some standards you wouldn't pass the first two years with those. What we got were four pretentious, uncreative, uninteresting films, one of which shows some traces of an idea, another of a theme, while the remaining two don't have either, and none of them managed to accomplish even these elementary schooling requirements.

Hardly anything in these movies suggests that the authors are young people, apart from the amateurish approach. But there's something suggesting the fear of open spaces. All four movies take place mostly in cramped rooms, stuffy apartments and bars. Perhaps this is the way of expression of a generation which never travelled, which rarely goes beyond the borders – of the country or of mediocrity?

It is especially hard to see where the movies were made. Only those who know the street or the hotel in Cetinje can be sure they were filmed in Montenegro. The rest could think they were made by the youth of some well-feathered Norwegian families who have lost in their idleness even that creative spark which divides the idleness from boredom and, at the age of twenty-something, are contemplating the unknown, convinced they have uncovered all secrets.

On top of the basic skills of the craft and the ability to master the language of the moving pictures, they're also lacking the sense of reality, the need to respond to it creatively, to transform it through original artistic

and social intervention. When will it arise within these young people, if not now? Is this the result of the submissive spirit which rules supreme at the Montenegrin university, from the political science department where the students are taught at the very first year that politics is dirty, all the way to the arts departments where they look down upon everybody who dares to be different, seeking art only in Beckettian waiting or in the l'art-pour-l'art escape from reality?

Naturally, there will be no serious critique of this omnibus in the Montenegrin media, nor will these works open up the necessary discourse on *our* issues. Here unhealthy solidarity is stronger in arts than in any other social sphere. And when solidarity is in crime, the ties are the strongest. Or, as one of them explained to us: I won't talk badly about my colleagues, somebody else should do it! And then, off the record, he will agree that these are bad movies. He'll also add that they couldn't have been much better for the 50 000 EUR they got from the Ministry of Culture, Media and Sports, and that it is important to support the first student movie in Montenegro! Just for the sake of comparison, that latest movie by **Želimir Žilnik** "The Old School of Capitalism" cost exactly as much!

We come to the fact that the film production of the Montenegrin educational system is at best unconvincing, and that the citizens are financing the whole thing so that somebody could become the first, not the best. It's little wonder, then, that our film authors are invisible. Partly because they are irrelevant in the artistic sense, and partly because their work doesn't deal with themselves nor with this world.

That's why Montenegro doesn't have the likes of the Oscar-winner **Danis Tanović**, who is very interested in the country he lives in and who doesn't shy from political engagement in order to make it better. Can you remember that anybody of our locally famous directors, actors, producers & co. ever stood up and tried to say, even metaphorically, but publicly, that our emperor is also naked, and that their silence and evasion also contribute to the illusion that he's wrapped in the mantle of power?

That's why the first and the so far best Montenegrin film by **Koča Pavlović** about the crimes of the war for peace won't be shown by any national television, even if it's being used as teaching material at 12 world-famous universities. **Branko Baletić**, the leader of the pioneers' group of the first student film, made a filmed version of the explanation of this entirely unprovoked national euphoria which makes us all equally guilty for it, covering up for the real ideologues, strategists and executors of the war, and putting in relative manner their responsibility.

That's why the story of Herzeg-Novi and Montenegro, and the crimes of deportation will be told for the big screen by the young director from Bosnia and Herzegovina **Alen Drljević**. The screenplay, a book by the journalist **Šeki Radonjčić**, has been long available to the public and authors in Montenegro. One would say the time wasn't right, the others that there was no money, but we can only be sure that there was no interest.

And, talking about money, which is always lacking when one needs to gloss over the lack of ideas, talent or work, it would be a good idea to check the costs of filming the graduation piece of the now famous **Jasmila Žbanić** "Red gummy boots". They say it is the early works that help us see who is worth investing in, and who should think about changing profession.

A look at the contemporary filmmaking in the region, like other frequently used lenses, gives us a solid overview of our progress on the road to Europe.

Croatian film is on a slow, but steady path upwards. Annual production is increasing, we see the rise of new and confirmation of old names among the authors. The themes and the genres vary, and the audiences have plenty to choose from. The Serbian film is being diluted, with the populist spectacles

reaping the biggest applauses, awards at the relevant festivals are rare, and engaged films even more so. Bosnian film, thanks to the talent and persistence of individual authors, not to the support of the system, is becoming world famous. An important film gathering, Sarajevo Film Festival, contributed to the promotion of the regional and Bosnian films, but also to the development of cinematography overall, and provided the necessary encouragement and recognition to the authors and their works. In the meantime, Montenegrin films remain provincial, and the Montenegro Film Festival, although happening for the 24th time, is yet to establish a profile and standards.

This cinematic mirror offers us a picture of Croatia which is diligently fulfilling its tasks and will certainly be the first to join the Union, Serbia held hostage in a vicious circle by Kosovo and its tycoons, B&H which is full of unknowns and whose potential nobody knows how to measure, and Montenegro whose context is closest to the legendary American drama by **David Lynch** "Twin Peaks".

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