

Bulletin

ORGANIZATIONS OF FILM AUTHORS IN SERBIA



CONVERSATION
WITH THE AUTHOR:

Vera Vlajić

“The skill of art is in making
technology into our tool,
and not in being the purpose
of filmmaking

INTERVIEW:

Predrag Perišić

UFUS | AFA

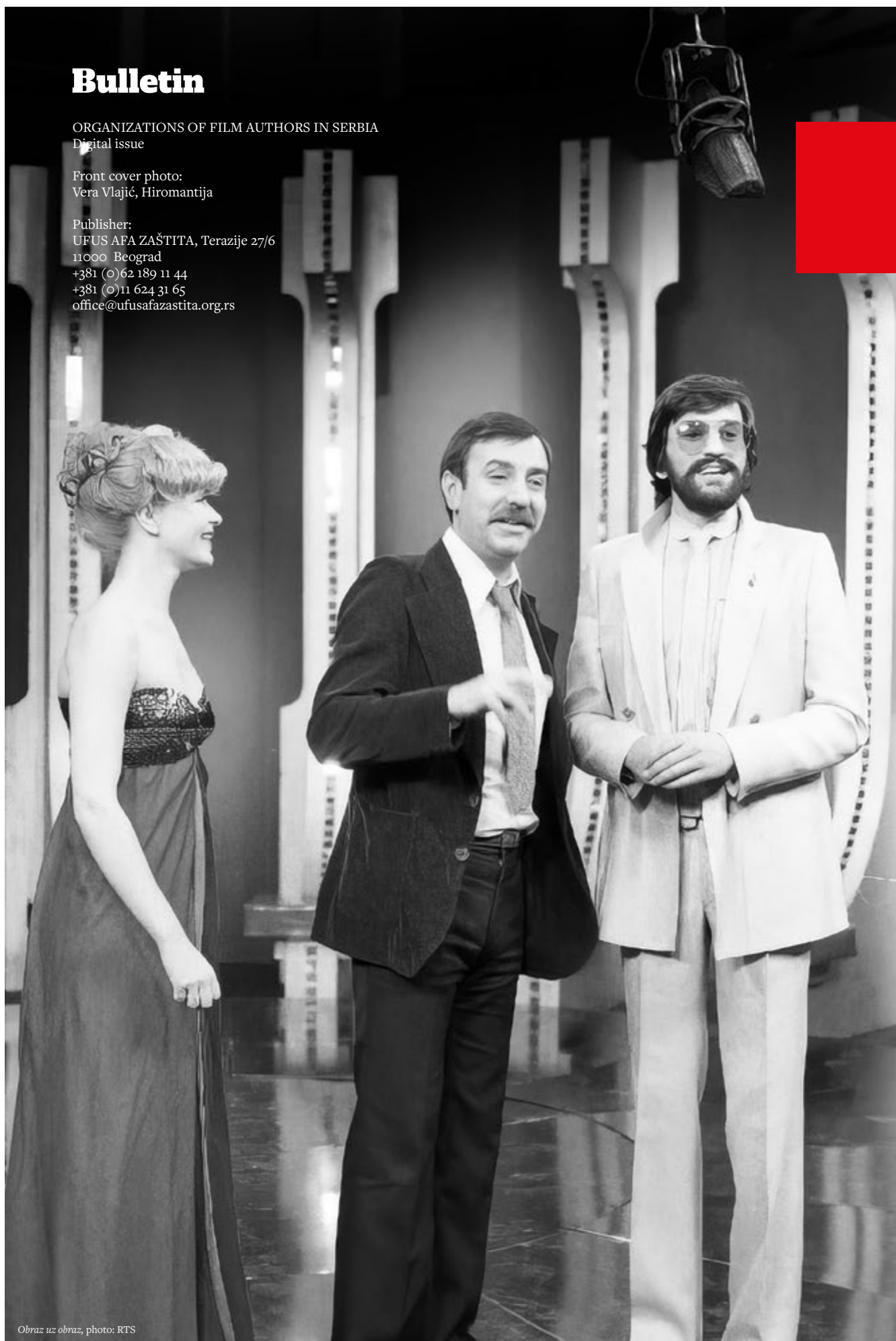
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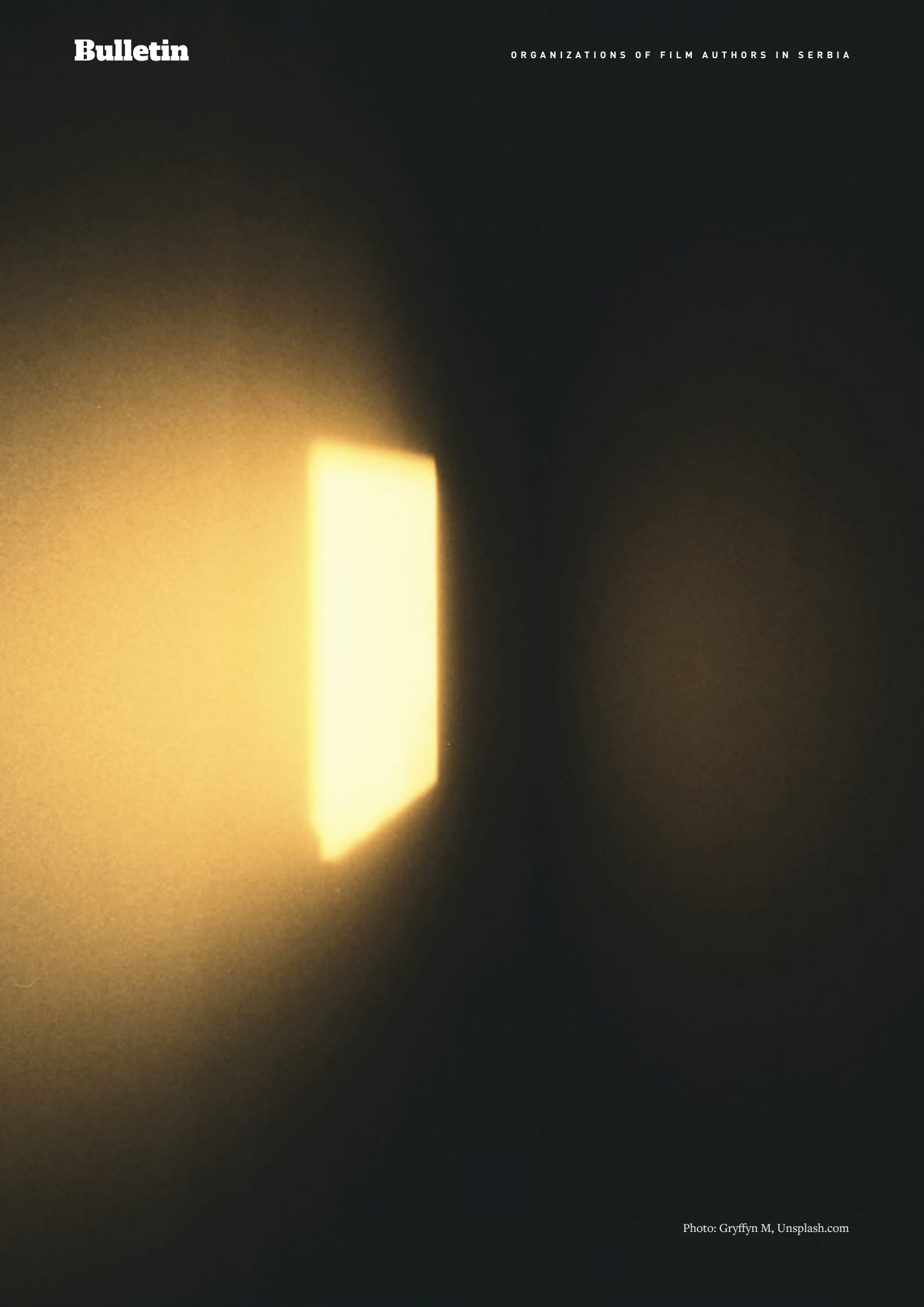
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EDITORIAL



Stefan Gelineo

Director of UFUS AFA

Editorial

On May 29, UFUS AFA successfully held the 11th regular Assembly of the organization, which was also electoral, at which the members of the Assembly voted for six new members of the Board of Directors (out of the total of 11), as their predecessors' terms had expired.

The new members of the Board of Directors are three women and three men – Andrijana Stojković, Ana Maria Rossi, Danica Pajović, Dimče Stojanovski, Milorad Glušica, and Srđan Anđelić – all recognized filmmakers (directors, screenwriters, cinematographers), which not only reflects the professional balance but also promotes the principle of equality in the organization's work.

The election of new members of the Board of Directors, as well as the election of Darko Bajić, a renowned director and screenwriter, as the president of the

UFUS AFA Board of Directors, represents an important step towards a further strengthening of the copyright protection of Serbian filmmakers.

At a time when copyright is increasingly threatened by fast-paced technological advancements, a stable and professional leadership is essential for any collective organization. UFUS AFA with the new Board of Directors has the potential to continue to protect and affirm the rights of filmmakers – the authors – even more strongly.

Most of the elected members have been part of UFUS AFA almost since its inception, which brings valuable continuity and in-depth understanding of everything that the organization has achieved in the previous period, but also, we believe, a readiness for future challenges. Their previous experience within the system of collective copyright will be of key importance for preserving stability, but also for a further improvement of mechanisms for protecting the interests of filmmakers.

We expect that the new Board of Directors will continue with a consistent and responsible policy of representing authors' rights, while opening space for new initiatives and strengthening the position of filmmakers within the institutional and legislative framework. As it has been pointed out several times, filmmakers in Serbia have yet to fight for the rights that their colleagues in Europe have had for a long time.

Two extremely important laws are being prepared – the Law on Copyright and the Law on Cinematography. In the previous period, UFUS AFA actively advocated for the improvement of the scope of protection of filmmakers, and will continue this struggle in the future with new people in the organization's managerial body.

INTERVIEW

Photo: Nikola Skenderija



Predrag Perišić

screenwriter, playwright and professor

A screenplay is a manuscript comprising moving pictures and sounds

Predrag Perišić, a well-known and award-winning film and TV screenwriter, playwright, and professor, made his debut on the big screen as a cowriter of the cult film *Ljubavni život Budimira Trajkovića* (Beloved Love, 1977) directed by Dejan Karaklajić. Predrag has written the scripts for some of the most popular Yugoslav films and TV series, such as the film series *Rad/Moj tata/Razvod na određeno vreme* (Fixed-term Employment (1980), Fixed-term Dad (1982), Fixed-term Divorce (1986)), the films *Nije lako s muškarcima*

(It Isn't Easy to Get Along with Men, 1985) and *Policajac sa Petlovog Brda* (Petlovo Brdo Cop), which was remade into an extremely successful series.

At the same time, Perišić left a lasting mark in the history of Television Belgrade as the author and screenwriter of dozens of shows, the most famous of which being *Maksimetar* (Maximeter), *Od glave do pete* (Head to Toe), *Obraz uz obraz* (Cheek to Cheek), *Sedam plus sedam* (Seven Plus Seven). In parallel with his career as a screenwriter, TV author, and entertainment program editor, he taught dramaturgy at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, and for a time was the head of the Department of Dramaturgy.

Getting the ball rolling, we asked Perišić, as an author behind some of the most popular comedies, if he still believes in the healing power of laughter, in the power of comedy.

Andrei Tarkovsky wrote, "Big things are ephemeral, small things are eternal." I would rephrase it and say, "Tragedies are ephemeral, comedies are eternal." How come? Because in our everyday life, in our families, at work, in dealing with the people around us, we find ourselves more often in comical than in tragic circumstances. And fortunately so! The audience likes to laugh at some funny idea, they like to see funny things happen to normal persons like themselves, especially if the event in question can happen to anyone.

The comedy great Harold Lloyd said that his formula for comedy is plain and simple: The movie hero must be likable to the audience because if the audience laughs at someone they dislike, it's not laughter for pleasure, it's no longer comedy, but a petty revenge and cruelty. Comedy requires cordiality in laughter. The viewer should be surprised, not deceived and disappointed.

All your scripts are based around ordinary people, their fortunes and misfortunes, "scenes from everyday life", which is the title of the book in which several of your scripts are collected. Are you still inspired by our everyday life?

Charlin said, "Life is a tragedy when seen in close-up, but a comedy in long-shot." To put it simply, humor



provokes laughter either through the individual's clumsiness or the circumstances in which the individual cannot manage. As viewers, we always side with the funny character, as he is helpless in his conflict with the harsh, real life. Does comedy boils down only to cheerfulness and tragedy only to grieving? In dramatic works, elements of tragedy are often mixed with those of comedy and vice versa. The line between the comic and the tragic is rather thin and imperceptible. They are often intermingled. A comic hero often brings us to tears, and we wonder if those are tears of joy or of sorrow. Let us take *Balkan Express*, a 1983 movie by Branko Baletić, as an example. The tragic and comedic elements are intertwined therein. The audience is led from laughter to tears. Life and death are made equal. People live to die, and die to live. Neither life has a joyful note, nor death a tragic note.

Your scripts live on through the unsurpassed trio of actors – Milena Dravić, Bata Živojinović, and Ljubiša Samardžić. What was it like to collaborate with those greats of our cinema?



Ljubavni život Budimira Trajkovića

Those were extraordinary actors. It was a great pleasure to write for them. With great actors, it doesn't matter if they acted in comedies or tragedies. They possessed a natural acting gift, a sense of proportion, sincere experience, emotional inspiration, identification with the character, so they didn't mind what genre the movie is. It's all the art of acting. If the actor is a genuine one. An actor... is an actor... is an actor... I've been lucky enough to work with genuine, great actors.

You are one of the most important TV program authors, as you wrote some of the extremely popular entertainment shows like *Maksimetar*, *Obraz uz obraz*, *Od glave do pete...* in the 1970s and 1980s, which set standards in that genre and for TV programs in general. What is your opinion of television and contemporary TV programs today – has there been any improvement in that regard, and in what way, and in what way have they perhaps declined?



Perišić with Bata Živojinović, photo: Private archive

Artificial intelligence cannot compose a love song that will move us to tears. Artificial intelligence does not have a soul. And without a soul, you're nothing.



Moj tata na određeno vreme

One of the basic theses in TV criticism was put forward in 1956 by film critic André Bazin, the ideologist of the new wave in French cinema: "Television is a surplus of products and a shortage of quality." I have worked in television for a very long time, almost 30 years. I remember when television was a serious artistic institution inside of which serious works of art were being created. But, like every other "golden age," that time lives on only in our memories now. I remember TV dramas written by Danilo Kiš, Borislav Pekić, Brana Crnčević, Mirko Kovač, Duško Kovačević, Filip David, Arsen Diklić, Slobodan Stojanović and many others. I remember when Živojin Pavlović, Saša Petrović, Aleksandar Đorđević, Đorđe Kadijević, Slava Ravasi directed for television... Television used to be able to produce valuable, one might say avant-garde works of art that were on par with significant theater and film productions. Let's just mention The Russian Art Experiment, the TV drama Sava Šumanović, the TV series Seobe and Vuk Karadžić. The entire TV production of today is already forgotten tomorrow. Mediocrity is touted as quality. Superficiality and incompetence as artistic value. TV series that are being shown today are forgotten when they stop being shown. We no longer have anything to remember or reminisce about. Images pass before our eyes without leaving a trace in our souls.

I believed that the appearance of new television channels would bring about a new program quality. However, the opposite happened. The more television, the worse the program. Good ideas, exquisite stories, imaginative plots, interesting documentaries have moved to the theater and to the big screen. Perhaps they actually belong there. Future generations will think that there was no television

in our time as it left nothing for future generations. I am happy that in my old age I can remember some beautiful things from my youth.

In recent years, and especially after the surge of streaming platforms, it seems that series have taken precedence over film, often also in terms of budget, script quality, acting, production... Do you think that series are a threat to movies (by that I primarily mean feature films)?

Since its inception in the 1930, television has always been linked to film in some way or another. I see the relationship between film and television as the relationship between two siblings. One is older, more respectable, and smarter, which is a movie, the other one younger, superficial, uncouth, prone to all kinds of excess and foolishness, which is television! Today's television, not only here but in most other countries as well, is a lesson in culture for mass consumers who, unfortunately, do not require high quality products. Mass culture consists of the world of myths, symbols, and images pertaining to an imaginary world and conjuring up an imaginary picture of life and events around us and people who move about in that world of deception and lies. Today, television is far from reality and from all the fears and doubts that reality implies. Television is increasingly becoming the propaganda machine of the political party in power.

Is television endangering film? I don't think so. Bernardo Bertolucci once said, "Maybe I'm an idealist, but I still





Rad na odredeno vreme

think of the movie theater as a cathedral where we all go together to dream the dream together.”

As a long-time professor of dramaturgy, can you tell us what are the rules/norms in your profession that are immutable and independent of contemporary trends?

Setting inspiration and literary enhancement aside, writing a film script is also a kind of craft. Movie and TV scripts are a special type of literature. A screenplay never opens with “once upon a time...”, but with exterior, interior, day, night... Writing a screenplay means first and foremost writing images, writing sounds... The glare of a car’s headlights, the screeching of tires, the illuminated window of a house, the murmur of rain, a woman’s voice in the distance calling for help, a child’s crying... The writer shapes the destinies and lives of his heroes in different environments, from a magnificent castle to a rundown shack. The writer creates characters and their lives. Hate, passion, love. A screenplay is a manuscript comprising moving images and sounds. Times change, but film remains the same. Those are the lives of people from the past or the present. Their life struggles and difficulties, hopes and disappointments. René Clair, a famous French director, clearly outlined that the screenplay approaches the theater in terms of structure, and the novel in terms of form. The film is neither recorded theatrical play nor a novel to read. A screenplay must get the best of both worlds.

Are you following the controversy that shook the world about the (ab)use of artificial intelligence? Do you believe that artificial intelligence can endanger the work of screenwriters and other writers, or do you think that human imagination is impossible to replicate?

I’m not an expert on artificial intelligence. I don’t know what is meant by that exactly. I suppose that AI can solve some mathematical problems, complex theorems, perform a chemical analysis and some other technical tasks, but I’m sure it can’t write a love song that will

bring us to tears. Artificial intelligence does not have a soul. And without a soul, you’re nothing...

You have been part of the UFUS AFA organization since its inception, and until recently you were also on the Board of Directors. Can you compare the attitude of your colleagues among the filmmakers and their knowledge of their rights a decade ago (when the organization started working) and today?

UFUS AFA is one of the handful of social organizations that take care of the social position of its members in a proper way. I remember a group of filmmakers sitting in the hall of the Cinematheque in Kosovska Street some ten years ago and daydreaming about such an organization that would protect the copyrights of filmmakers. We daydreamed that someone would take care of our past work and protect us as authors who would be able to live off their past work in their old age. And fortunately for us, that dream has come true. Unexpected, but true. Today, UFUS AFA is a modern, contemporary organization that protects the rights of filmmakers. It doesn’t matter what branch we belong to, whether we are directors, screenwriters, videographers, animators... we all have a common goal: to do everything to keep the organization developing in times that are quite difficult and challenging.

UFUS AFA is one of the handful of social organizations taking proper care of the social position of its members.



Nije lako sa muškarcima



Policajac sa Petlovog brda



The XI Assembly of UFUS AFA,
photo: Vojislav Gelevski



CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

**Vera Vlajić**

screenwriter, cartoonist, animator, and film director

The skill of art is in making technology into our tool, and not in being the purpose of filmmaking

Animation seemed to be a logical choice for you, being an art historian, as it reconciles your love for painting and your love for film. How did you get into the world of animated movies?

My first encounter with the world of art was in pre-school, when I happened to attend a rehearsal of a puppet theater in Pančevo. That encounter with puppets and marionettes in front of and behind the stage was so powerful that I already knew right then that art would be something I would be involved with when I grew up. That's why, as a child, I went to ballet and music school, I drew, and just before my graduation from high school I visited the Pančevo Cinema Club, which appeared to

me as a new exciting place where young people could express their creativity through film art. That's where I was introduced to animation.

Since at that time I didn't have a clear picture of what would be the primary art I would commit myself to, and animation as a new medium was not taught at any faculty, I decided to study History of Art at the Faculty of Philosophy as a place where I would be in contact with art. As someone who loved and was fascinated by drawing and painting, but also by film art, especially animation, which combined visual, dramatic, musical and film arts, I knew that I had to learn the craft to be able to do it properly. That's how I got to "Zastava film" in the early 1970s, which at that time was dealing with special and educational films, but had a state-of-the-art animation studio, with drawing and animating tables, endless quantities of celluloid foils on which drawings were copied and colored, a department for recording animations with three Crass animation stands for recording square by square, as an irreplaceable tool for shooting an animated movie. For me, that experience and the opportunity to master the process of making an animated movie was very important.

You have almost half a century of experience in the world of animation. Has the animation really changed that much (as it seems to us laymen) or has some essence remained the same, and only the form has changed?

This year it is exactly half a century since my animated movie *Uvo* (The Ear) appeared, for which I won the debut award at the Yugoslav Documentary and Short Film Festival. That is an enormous period of time in one's life. Since the work on an animated movie takes a long time, when I sum up what I have done, I say to myself, "so many years – in only few minutes". Of course, a lot has changed during that period, from several technological revolutions in terms of production to the perception of animation as art. In general, the trend in the production of animated movies is to insist on form. Therefore, the form took precedence over the essence, which is not only in the content and the way of processing that content but also in what separates the inimitability of art through the expression of emotions.





Poster for *Avanture karikature*

As for the author's animated movie, it suffers more and more from monotony, the absence of the author's mark and, as with almost all arts, the loss of excitement and uniqueness.

Animation, apart from the Faculty of Applied Arts, has recently also been part of the department at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts. How much has modern computer technology helped (or hindered) animated movie?

Very early on, while working at TV Belgrade in the mid-1980s on the state-of-the-art machines for computer image generation and a lot of complicated animation programs, I switched to the so-called Computer Animation. At first, I was fascinated by the possibility of choosing among various tools including a large selection of colors, brushes, 3D animation, through an independent work process, to the final product tailored according to the TV program requirements. But I missed the spontaneity provided by working with pen on paper and the unrepeatability of that process. That's why in my author's films I kept drawings and animation on paper, which is still irreplaceable for 2D classic animation, although without the final computer processing it is impossible to reach new digital formats, which have completely replaced the film tape.

So in conclusion, without computer technologies it is no longer possible to create any audiovisual content, but the skill of art is in making technology into our tool, and not in being the purpose of filmmaking.

What do you find so interesting about caricature that you dedicated several of your films, including the latest award-winning feature-length animated movie *Avanture karikature* (The Caricature Adventures)?

I've always been keen on drawing, regardless of it being an illustration for a book or a comic book. *Politikin zabavnik* was mandatory reading in my childhood, and even later. It contained a large number of illustrations that related to a certain text, as well as funny messages that could be associated with cartoons, and a large number of comics that usually contained some funny gag. Later, when I started reading serious newspapers, caricatures often said more, and more clearly, in one or more pictures than newspaper articles, and with their satirical content and criticism of political events, as well as the adventures of ordinary people, the caricatures made me laugh. Among the abundance of topics that cartoonists dealt with, there were also serious philosophical ones. This possibility of connecting cartoons to a specific content or chronology of events of certain eras, which left their mark on the time and the people the cartoonists dealt with, inspired me to make several animated short films.

The feature-length animated movie *The Caricature Adventures* was born out of the need to follow the history of Serbian caricature in animated form through the most important newspapers and magazines that dealt with caricature, as well as the most important authors who collaborated in them, from the nineteenth



Photo: Private archive



The obsession with visual effects and the potential of computer-generated images and animation distracts the authors from the single most important thing, in addition to originality – the transfer of emotions to the viewer, which is the essence of all art

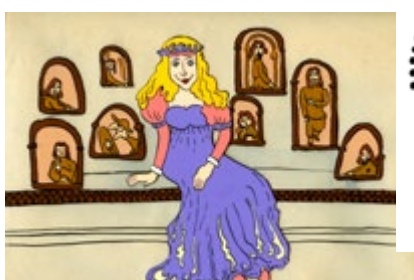
century, when caricature first appeared in our country, until the beginning of the twenty-first century. In addition to caricature in Serbia, I also covered caricature in Yugoslavia, since for more than seventy years it was a unified space, both in terms of society and of state, which is reflected in the themes that are represented in them. That undertaking was content-extensive and complicated to implement. Various authors' works, various eras and events had to be translated into a unique animated form, while avoiding a mere enumeration and attempting to get a new interesting content.

Which film would you single out as your most personal? Is it the one with painterly motifs or something else?

Since film, television or special/applied animation was my way of expressing myself, various art forms appeared suitable as a basis for my work. Sometimes those were pictures or drawings by visual artists as a certain art form, which I shaped into animated stories, at other times, as I already mentioned, those were caricatures. But, as I also had certain ideas which I wanted to translate into a film, without having an artistic template for it, I also used my drawings, so I made films that are my artistic work from start to finish, including *Hirromantija – ili kako sam se pročitala* (Chiromancy – or How I Read Myself), *Crni film* (Black Film), *Ženska strana romana* (The Woman's Side of the Novel) and a few more in which I dealt sometimes with the visual form, and at other with the emotion that was the subject of my interest at that particular moment.



DVD omot



Dulčinea

What is your view of the contemporary animated movie?

As for the world production of author's animated movie, it has suffered from commercialization and technological revolution to the detriment of personal touches and creativity. There are no more strong author's works or exceptional films, or they are at least very rare. And as far as the Serbian animated movie is concerned, it is currently on the decline, not only in terms of authorship but also in terms of production. The funds allocated for animated movies are disproportionately small as compared to those allocated for documentaries and feature films, although animated movies are very demanding to create both materially and time-wise. The number of films that are supported at annual contests is only three or four a year, with, I will repeat, unrealistically small funds, so as a result last year we did not have a single completed animated movie or a short film, and, the way things are, there won't be any made this year either. So, as far as the animated movie in Serbia is concerned, its fate is regrettable.

Are you, like many of your colleagues, worried about the (ab)use of artificial intelligence in the creation of artistic and film works, but also in the field of animated movies?

Artificial intelligence is our reality. In addition to its positive aspects in film production, in terms of improving tools and programs, it is present in all aspects of film art. Unfortunately, it is misused, especially in animation, where it is more and more present. The obsession with visual effects and the potential of computer-generated images and animation distracts the authors from the single most important thing, in addition to originality – the transfer of emotions to the viewer, which is the essence of all art.

Serbian animated movies are currently on the decline, in terms of not only authorship but also production. Last year we did not have a single completed animated movie or a short film, and we probably won't have any of them made this year either.



Crni film



LEGAL ADVICE

Photo: Aleksandar Carević



Stevan Pajović

Lawyer at TS Legal

The contract on film authorship and the shortcomings of freedom of contract

In the modern film industry, contracts play a key role in regulating rights and obligations between authors and producers. The Law on Copyright and Related Rights stipulates that in a film authorship contract one or more persons oblige to the producer of the film work (the producer) that they will collaborate creatively on the production of the film work and assign to him their copyrights to that work. However, there are significant obstacles and shortcomings of the freedom of contract that prevent fair protection of the rights of film authors.

In practice, the concentration of all rights is often in the hands of producers, who simultaneously own the copyright as well as the interpretation and producer rights of videograms. The author, as the weaker party in the contract, is forced to cede all property rights to the

producer for a one-time payment in the film authorship contract. In that way, they are excluded from the further chain of exploitation of their work. Concluded before the creation of the work, the contract on the film authorship cannot foresee all possible means and markets of exploitation that change over time, nor can it predict the commercial success of the film. That is especially important for the online use of film works, which despite the rapid growth, do not bring additional compensation to the authors.

The concentration of all rights in the hands of producers, especially over a long period of time, significantly increases their financial power in relation to the authors. That power imbalance allows the producers to dominate the entire chain of exploitation, from production to sales and distribution. By controlling the process and revenues, they weaken the negotiating position of the authors, thereby putting them in a subordinate position. That situation creates a vicious circle in which producers use their economic power to impose unfavorable conditions, while the authors, often without the ability to influence contractual terms or demand fair compensation, become increasingly financially dependent on those same producers. As a consequence, instead of an equal partnership, a model is being developed in which the producers dominate the market, while the authors become only their contractual contractors.

Within the scope of our legal system, there are security mechanisms aimed at protecting the rights of authors and ensuring a fairer relationship in the process of creating and using copyrighted works. Article 66 of the Law on Copyright and Related Rights prescribes that the assignment of property rights for a work that has not yet been created is permitted only if the type of future work and the methods of its exploitation are clearly defined. It is also stipulated that the assignment of rights for all future works of one author, as well as for unknown forms of exploitation, is void, thus preventing producers from being given almost unlimited and imprecisely defined rights. Article 68 further protects the authors by considering that, in case of doubt as to the content and scope of assigned or transferred rights, fewer rights have been assigned or transferred than may have been intended. Article 70, on the other hand, stipulates that the author or their successor may request changes to the contract if the profit obtained from the use of the work significantly exceeds the agreed remuneration. Article



71 allows the authors and their heirs to deny permission for further use or withdraw the assigned rights, if the acquired rights are not exercised in accordance with the contract. Finally, Article 92 regulates in detail the issue of royalties in contracts for film works. It clarifies that, if compensation is agreed upon, it must be clearly determined in relation to the form and scope of exploitation, and that compensation for one use does not automatically imply compensation for other forms of exploitation of the work. In addition, the law requires the producer to use the finished film, inform the co-authors of the generated income, and allow them to see the business books.

However, despite the formal existence of those legal mechanisms, their implementation and enforcement are almost non-existent or extremely limited. The main problem is the author's weak negotiating position, which significantly affects their ability to effectively represent their rights and interests in the decision-making process. Namely, in practice, producers, as the financially stronger party, often ignore or bypass the request to alter the contract or to inspect the business books, because the law does not provide for effective penal or enforcement mechanisms that would force them to

cooperate. Without access to those data, it is difficult for authors to challenge or demand the enforcement of their rights in any procedure. As a result, authors are reduced to the status of passive participants in the process of exploiting their creative creation, and their rights are de facto neglected.

What are the possible solutions? Collective bargaining can be an effective option for solving the problems of unfair contracts and inadequate compensation for authors. Namely, through organized collective bargaining, the authors could significantly strengthen their negotiating position, achieving fairer contractual conditions. However, that requires appropriate market conditions and strong trade union organizations, which are still not sufficiently developed or present in our country. The most effective and stable solution remains the adoption of special legislative measures that would ensure the inalienable right to fair compensation, which would be paid by the user through a system of mandatory collective exercise of rights. Such rules would ensure that authors are fairly compensated for their work and that their rights are effectively protected, regardless of market conditions or the strength of their negotiating position.



Photo: Dimitri Karastelev, Unsplash.com



Ženska strana romana

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