When you can't change things, you can always change your point of view.

GOODBYE, HOW ARE YOU?
A Satirical Documentary Fairytale

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“GOODBYE, HOW ARE YOU?” – a satirical documentary fairy tale

“A chaptered film essay of highest originality. I feel like I do when I have seen a play of Samuel Beckett, provoked and entertained in a creative way. Want to see it again. Bravo!” – Tue Steen Miller

“The beautifully selected and wittily juxtaposed images form an insightful, compelling portrait of daily existence in all its banalities, extremes and ironies. With shades of Patrick Keiller and Chris Marker, this collage of ideas is both thought-provoking and darkly comic.” – Edinburgh Film Festival

“Soaked in satire, both visually and intellectually, this offbeat introduction to Serbian aphorisms is a rallying cry for us to refresh our jaded perspective.” – Dok.Fest Munich

Synopsis: The wittiest, blackest satirical aphorisms of the modern era are saluted in this entertaining Serbian travelogue detailing how citizens use language to critique – and resist – the madness of politics. A fascinating essay-film in the tradition of Chris Marker and Jean-Luc Godard, and a primer on Balkan intellectual thought, resistance, and history.

Main festivals & awards: DOCSDF Mexico City (Best Mid-length Doc), Mediawave FF Hungary (Grand Prix), DokMa Maribor (Best Mid-length Doc), Soleluna FF Palermo (Most Innovative Film), EcoFilms Rodos (Audience Award), Dallas Videofest (Best Feature-Length Doc), Iasi FF (Best Documentary), Uruguay FF (Jury Mention), Documenta Madrid (Jury Mention), Deboshir FF St.Petersburg (Jury Mention), AFI Silverdocs, Edinburgh FF, Abu Dhabi FF, Yerevan FF, Sarajevo FF, Huesca FF, Go East Wiesbaden FF, Motovun FF, Parnu FF, Cork FF, Dok.Fest Munich, Docupolis Barcelona, Dok.Leipzig, Jihlava Doc FF, DMZ Docs Korea, Anuu-ru Aboro FF New Caledonia, RIDM Montreal, Meetings in Siberia FF, Sofia FF, Dokufest Prizren, one World FF Bucharest, Play-Doc Tui, Ljubljana Doc FF, London Doc FF, Al Jazeera Doc FF, Planete Doc Warsaw, Docstoc FF Mexico, Documentarist Istanbul, MakeDox Skopje, Underhill FF Podgorica, Jerusalem FF, Aye Aye FF Nancy, Bratislava FF, TIDF Taiwan, Hot Springs FF, Listapad FF Minsk, Tirana FF, Kustendorf FF, Docudays Beirut…

Broadcasters: ARTE / MDR (Germany, France), YLE (Finland), SVT (Sweden), IBA / Channel 1 (Israel), TVC (Catalunya), Cape Town TV (South Africa), ERR (Estonia), RTRS (Bosnia), RTV Slovenia

Distribution contact: Boris Mitić (director & producer), 00.381.63.7715.241, skype: borismitic info@dribblingpictures.com, www.dribblingpictures.com

Written, filmed, edited, directed and produced by Boris Mitić

Co-editing: Aleksandar Uhrin. Sound mix: Ivan Uzelac

Featuring aphorisms from The Belgrade Aphoristic Circle

Narrated by Nebojša Glogovac. Music by Pascal Comelade

A Dribbling Pictures production, in association with ARTE, MDR, YLE, SVT, the Serbian Film Center, the Serbian Ministry of Culture and the City of Belgrade

SCREENING FORMAT : HDCAM / DIGIBETA / BETA SP, 56/60 min.
In Serbian, with English, French, Russian, German, Spanish, Catalan, Hebrew or Arabic subtitles

www.dribblingpictures.com
GOODBYE, HOW ARE YOU?
synopsis (long)

Described as “sharp proverbs with a twist”, satirical aphorisms are the best antidote to life Serbia has to offer. They appear everywhere – in booklets, newspapers, slang, graffiti, street protests, screenplay lines. Their authors – ordinary people with an exceptional talent for observation and wordplays. Their consumers – an otherwise dejected general public. Their goal – demystifying commentary, empowering subversion, intellectual consolation.

Why shouldn’t we be proud of our past when each new day is worse than the previous one?

Using creative narration and satirical documentary footage, this film will introduce you to the uplifting world of Serbian satirical aphorisms and will make you rediscover the panache of images through the power of words - and vice versa.

After the 7th glass, I drank the 6th one. After the 6th, I drank the 5th one. And so on, until I sobered up.

The story is told by an imaginary anti-hero who has experienced at a young age everything that he possibly could, and now feels thoroughly unchallenged with life. As he sardonically laments on his accelerated biography, his voiceover is metaphorically counterbalanced by carefully edited “satirical documentary images” – unique, unusual, semantically rich and visually paradoxical footage filmed or collected on a three-year, 50.000 km road trip along Serbian back roads.

The worst has not passed. The best is yet to come.

The Narrator feels so saturated that his only temporary refuge is the playfulness of satirical aphorisms, which he effectively uses as punch lines in his confession. But his inner torment proves to be a tough case, as his nihilistic urge makes him challenge to a series of absurd duels various archetype antagonists of today’s society, before he realizes that they are all been already rendered obsolete by the very satirical aphorisms that he favors so much. This insight finally helps him come face to face with his only worthy opponent - the enemy within...

I have a choice: I will either be a marionette, or my life will hang by a thread.

We cannot change things, but we can change our perspective of things. Satirical narration, satirical aphorisms and satirical documentary images are the perfect cinema recipe for giving us back what we need the most in this self-destructing world: a new vision, intellectual satisfaction, a fake sense of hope and a big smile.

Eureka! I don’t remember anything anymore!
GOODBYE, HOW ARE YOU?

director’s note

Nominally a documentary about Serbian satirical aphorisms, “Goodbye, How Are You?” is neither a film about Serbia nor about literature – it is rather a universal journey into a specific, soothing state of mind which we can enter through the power of words, and in this case, through a special kind of images.

The world has long turned upside-down, so the only way to understand it is to use descriptions and commentary which are also downside-up. Subversive aphorisms, introspective one-or-two-liners so commonly practiced in satire-friendly Serbia, are excellent examples of such tactical mind-twists: those “half-truths which reveal the truth and a half” offer offbeat yet serious explanations for every possible life situation.

They show everyone’s vices and virtues more accurately than any positivistic or moralistic approach and weave together a tragi-comical and potentially healing x-ray of our times. Besides, their short form matches the fragmented attention span of today’s audience, while their sharp, poignant irony denotes the perfect, perhaps ultimate contemporary discourse.

After two ‘accidental’ documentaries filmed in 2003 and 2004, I consciously searched for a new, original, local topic which would be both intellectually inspiring and cinematographically challenging, and thus started this four-year adventure in aphoristic wonderland.

The film’s structure appears to be very simple, but getting there was a tedious process.

After reading over 400 Serbian aphoristic books – practically everything that was ever published -- I selected several hundred of the most effective, most universal and most translatable aphorisms.

At the same time, an extensive comparative research showed, to my great and pleasant surprise, that Serbian aphorisms do have an unique edge on the international stage, as confirmed by featured articles in the New York Times, Playboy, Anthologies of world aphorisms and British academic circles.

Along the way, I’ve spent much time befriending the best Serbian aphorists, filming interviews in many strange ways in many unusual locations, but that footage, however interesting or creative, couldn’t pay tribute to the spirit and impact of their written satire. So one day, I decided to bypass the aphorists altogether, to make a film about the aphorists - without the aphorists.

Similarly, I’ve always thought I would need a narration in the film, at least for background purposes, but couldn’t decide as to who would be the narrator – some expert, an omniscient voice, one of the aphorists, myself… But again, every option sounded too pretentious, too explicit, too explanatory, too anti-cinematographic. So another day, I decided to remove the background information as well, to make a film on aphorisms - without providing any background on aphorisms.
I thus trashed two years of work and resorted to more radical, lateral attempts to try illustrate with film language what these people were doing with words. After months of re-versioning, I came up with the idea of a fictional narrator – the saturated XXI century man archetype – whom everybody could identify with and who would show how aphorisms function in real life. Throughout his confession, he would use satirical aphorisms as punch lines -- to introduce, develop and especially to conclude various chapters or themes of his life story.

Conversely, the exclusive “satirical documentary images” which would illustrate the narration would visually match this specific satirical mindset. Just like the aphorisms themselves, each image in the film is surprising, paradoxical, funny and multilayered. They capture and emphasize the always-present but never-filmed satirical details of our lives, loading them with new meaning. The connotations that arise are further multiplied by subjective audience reading, by the sequential juxtaposition of images and by their teasing connection to the narration.

Consequently, not only do you get a “different point of view” from the text, you also get it from the pictures and from the combined effect of narration & images as well. Altogether, this corresponds to that special feeling of intellectual excitement, of reaching a special layer of truth which I like to call satirical vérité, which is the raison d’être of satirical aphorisms in the first place, and which was the ultimate cinema target of this film project from the very start.

The result is a unique, ambitiously authentic, demanding yet crowdpleasing feature documentary, combining plot references of Zelig, Apocalypse Now, Leaving Las Vegas, Fight Club, In Praise of Folly, Cyrano de Bergerac, Don Quixote, Notes from the Underground, A Hero of our Time… and most importantly – of our own lives.
GOODBYE, HOW ARE YOU?
treatment digest

CASTING:
THE SATURATED NARRATOR – representing all of us combined
THE SATURATED NARRATOR’S “FRIEND” – representing all Serbian aphorists combined and/or the Narrator’s alter ego.

AUDIO:
SATIRICAL-VERITE VOICEOVER, an autobiographical confession of the fictional NARRATOR, often quoting the soothing aphorisms of his imaginary FRIEND.

VIDEO:
UNIQUE SATIRICAL DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE, made in Serbia but universal, archival + contemporary, metaphorically matching or counterbalancing the narration.

STRUCTURE:
The NARRATOR’s existential lament is challenged by aphoristical therapy, theme after theme, in 24 chapters (faith, crime, ideology, corruption, politics, war, money, love, liberty, identity…)

DRAMATIC DEVICE:
The saturated NARRATOR has only one motivation left: to chose how he will die. He challenges various archetype antagonists of today’s society to absurd duels, but realizes ad hoc that all his potential opponents have already been ridiculed by the aphoristic comments of his FRIEND.

DRAMATIC ARC:
The NARRATOR’S self-destructive urge, temporarily soothed by his FRIEND’s comments, grows during the film, until the NARRATOR’s final confrontation with… himself. Two-thirds into the film, his FRIEND also goes through an existential crisis (on the meaning of writing), but this time he is the one who is saved by the NARRATOR.

DIGEST:
Satirical point of view requires satirical content.
Satirical content implies satirical narration.
Satirical narration is best illustrated by satirical documentary images.

Satirical documentary images are unusual shots of everyday life, filmed from a strange perspective or containing surprising layers of meaning.

Satirical documentary images used in the film are both old and new. 20% of the material is archival (acquired from 100+ national and local TV stations, cine-clubs, private home videos and amateur sources), the rest was filmed on a well-prepared but uninhibited 50.000 km road trip along Serbian back roads, with no aim other than stumbling upon strangely illustrative shots of the satire that we are living.

Satirically edited, the satirical narration and satirical images create exciting new layers of meaning, approaching this special layer of truth that I call satirical vérité. On the other hand, a less engaged audience can also enjoy the film as sheer audio, visual or audiovisual entertainment.
GOODBYE, HOW ARE YOU?
- script -

DRIBBLING PICTURES
presents

In association with
ARTE, MDR, SVT, YLE

With support from
THE SERBIAN MINISTRY OF CULTURE
THE SERBIAN FILM CENTER
THE CITY OF BELGRADE

A SATIRICAL DOCUMENTARY FAIRY TALE

00-24

01
GOODBYE, HOW ARE YOU?

Goodbye,
how are you?

Imagine then
how I must feel...

Already at a young age
I went through so much

day I’ve been bored
ever since.

And now...

“Now I am ready to die
for what I believe in,

but thank God,
I don’t believe
in anything anymore…”

02

REJOICE IN PRO-CHOICE

“I am strongest
when things are hardest,

but for me,
everything comes easy…”

Instead of enjoying my success,

I deplore every wasted challenge…

Instead of crying over my failures,

I keep growing ever more immune…

“Don’t get me wrong,
I am not a bad person…

I am a just bad survivor.”

My last inspiration
is to choose how I will die.

But even that
seems quite obvious…

The only possible ending
for a character like me

is to die an absurd death…

in some absurd
contemporary duel.

Just wait until I find
myself a suitable opponent…

MY SECOND AND MY FIRST DUELS

But I have one friend...
Who is also your friend...

He is my second
in all my duels.

But instead of assisting me,
he always tries to discourage me.

When I asked him for help,
he sent me for a check-up,

but he gave me good advice:

"Bring a gift to your doctor
and don’t forget –

"Your health is in your hands!"

When I mentioned
Hippocrates’ oath,

My Friend said it only meant that
"every doctor must treat every patient
in the most ethical way

regardless of the type of whiskey
they bring him as a gift…"

In the end, the nurse
wrote my diagnosis herself:

"A patient who does not know
that a doctor needs to bribed
is a medical phenomenon."

And she sent me away.
I never even got to see that doctor…
When I called the elections for my first opponent, two candidates singled out. The first one had a slogan: “Don’t leave me, people! I am a charismatic person!” And the other one: “We will rob, rape and kill you all. Does anyone have a better political program?”

When it came to voting, my Friend had no dilemma. He wrote on the ballot: “I do not agree with you, but since I am a tolerant person, I will allow you the opportunity to agree with me.” Nobody agreed, the elections were cancelled and I had to search for yet another candidate for my duel…

04

LIKE A SAMURAI
I never hurt anyone,
I never bribed anyone,
I never stole anything...

I had to express my discontent in some different way...

Finding playmates for a duel has never been difficult,

and today,
it is easier than ever...

All those good people with bad intentions...

And all those bad people with good intentions...

"Everybody is on our side... except us”，

as my friend would say.

This duel idea might seem to you a bit immature,

indecent,

maybe even illegal...

But everything is upside down anyways...

And this makes things much easier for me.

"Death doesn't kill like life does."

Or to quote my friend again:
"We can’t run away from destiny. 
Destiny will run away from us."

05

ELEGY FOR A BAD Omen

One day, I stumbled upon a dead black cat.

As everybody waited to see what would happen,

my friend offered an explanation:

“A black cat crossed our way. 
The next day, it died.”

What could this possibly mean?

That even our superstitions are wrong?

Or perhaps that they are true, but that we are even stronger?

Maybe we are the ones who bring bad luck to others?

Maybe we are black cats for the black cats?!

My friend always makes up comments like this, especially about the people I want to fight in my duels.

He never says clearly that he wants to stop me,
but he always ridicules my opponents so much

that I really end up losing
the will to fight them...

Sometimes I let him win,
of course,

but in most cases
he is absolutely right.

The people I want to challenge
the most are unworthy

even of absurd duels...

06

A WEEKEND REDEMPTION

There’s this minister,
for example...

My friend and I know him
from the local street corner...

Back then we used to
open beers with our teeth, and now...

Now he’s got a six-pack
of golden teeth in his mouth.

I couldn’t even book a duel with him,
he is always so busy...

Even for old friends.

We asked to see him
over the weekend, at least,
but his secretary, who is actually also our friend,
told us that “the minister was taking weekends off,
which was his contribution to the fight against organized crime.”

Then she suddenly started praising his honesty, which we never mentioned.

“The Minister was shocked when he found out that he was receiving a triple salary.

He immediately gave himself a bonus to start an investigation.”

“The Minister promised to the nation that we would live better.

And it’s true – the two of us do live better…”

“The Minister is a very successful politician.

He was acquitted several times.”

And so on...

Until she burst into tears and admitted:

“We made a lot of mistakes.

Please arrest those who voted for us!”

UNTIL WE REINVENT OURSELVES
A Russian poet once challenged his colleague to fight for the heart of an invented woman.

They invented her, and then they started fighting for her.

Isn’t that the best reason if we need to fight over women?

I did fall in love with many beautiful girls, and they loved me too, but that only teased my ego, and I would find no salvation...

I still love them...

I am grateful for a few memorable moments...

And I would give my life for them...

but they make me bored...

My friend says:

“If your wife cheated on you with your best friend, don’t worry. He is not your best friend.”

But, as we said already, we shouldn’t fight over women, nor engage in duels, God forbid.

Unless they are imaginary, of course...
"In the end, I did find a woman I simply cannot live without.

Wherever I run away to, she always finds me..."

08

OF BOOKS AND BONES

ho is the narrator here?

It’s not me.

And who is that friend of mine?

Is it a dog?

It’s not a dog.

“My dog is my best friend.

That’s why he could tell me where he buried the bone.”

“No, the book is your best friend,

said the dog, a bit tired of it all.”

09

FOR MY 2 OR 3 CHILDREN

I even used to be a normal person...

I planted a tree,

I built a stadium,

a church,

a gas-station...

a car-wash, of course...

a bakery...

I had a memorable wedding...

They are still playing it on TV.

I made... two or three kids,

but I stopped when I realized how much they take after me...

I almost challenged them to a duel...

My friend would say:

“We are worried about the young... because they want our jobs.”

Or maybe more optimistically...

“A nation with such wonderful youth should not worry about the future...

...of Canada or Australia.”

“And when a boomerang leaves this place...

It never returns.”

A LONG JOURNEY SIGNED ON EVERY PAGE

I am truly an ungrateful person...
I get used so easily
to both sorrow and pleasure

that my life becomes emptier
day by day.

There’s only one solution
– to travel –

but I’ve travelled a lot already...

Now I find it much more interesting
just to stand in line for visas...

All the anger that I feel in those moments
is teasing my imagination so much

that I am actually very grateful
for the inspiration.

And so is my friend...

Once he took the 30-page application form
and wrote down these thoughts:

“Even the sky is not the same
for everybody.

For some, it is blue.

For others, it is leaking…”

“Some animals
have human characteristics.

All the others I do like.”

“They are applying a sticks
and carrots policy on us.

First they beat us with sticks...
and then with carrots.”
“We, the undersigned, are sinking deeper and deeper.”

People then started walking out with their visa results...

Some were swearing so quietly while others had such an idiotic smile, that I ran away from the line, disgusted, and I completely forgot about my duel...

11

DON'T YOU PUSH ME, PLEASE!

Before, things used to be clear...

If you insulted someone, He’d be forced to start a fight.

And now?

Some people are impossible to insult, let alone to challenge to a duel...

Whatever you tell them, they find an excuse.

Others get insulted even when you don’t talk to them.

I like those the most.
They boast ever so loudly, 
but in the end, 
they insist on buying you a drink.

My friend offered them 
a few timeless slogans:

“Attack is our best form of defence, 
but we didn’t come here to defend ourselves.”

“We wanted to fight down to the last man standing... 
but there simply weren’t enough of us...”

“For all our failures, 
we blame our mentality.

That’s what our mentality is like.”

“At any given moment, 
we know what we want.

We just don't know
when that moment is.”

12

THE WAR STARTED IT FIRST

“Earth. 
Air. 
Water. 
Fire. 
Power.”

“Spring. 
Summer. 
Fall. 
Winter. 
War.”

My friend says:

“Every conflict can be solved in a peaceful way.

That’s why we are warning you not to show any resistance!”

“The conflict could not have been avoided.

You were fighting for peace, we were fighting against war.”

As to who started first...

“The lie would tell you that the truth started first...”

But my friend has more theories:

“Nobody knows who fired first.

What is sure is that they didn’t hesitate to shoot back.”

“The enemy surprised us again. We expected that they would attack first.”

“We wanted the war to finish as soon as possible.

That's why we started it first.”

And then...

“Nobody wanted to stop shooting until the war ended.”

Because, as we know...

“The longer the war, the closer we are to peace..."
"And if nobody wins, in the end, 
it's not a big a deal...

We will toss a coin to see 
who will write history."

13

A LA GUERRE COMME A LA GUERRE, 
MON CHER

I’ve been in war myself

and I understand
why my friend says:

“If only we really had as many war heroes 
as it turned out we did…”

There are all kinds of people in the war...

This kind …

and the ‘other’ kind.

That’s why I wanted to challenge 
one of them of that “other kind”,

so I approached him 
in an old-fashioned way:

I heard you were brave, 
let’s fight a duel?

But he wasn’t quite in the mood...

and he immediately 
started making up excuses:

“On the frontline, 
I was actually very good.
I took care of a television set which lost everybody in this world.”

“The enemy never slept.

We were shelling him day and night.”

“We don’t have blood on our hands. There was blood only up to the knees…”

But when he realized whom he was talking to,

he also told me something smart:

“War, then peace. That will please everyone.”

Every war is different, but every war is a crime in itself.

There are no war crimes.

War is a crime.

But I hope, he added,

“that we will not go on trial for all the atrocities that we committed.

Isn’t it human to have hope?”

In the end, I didn’t even manage to challenge him to a duel.

“He was arrested … because he had double-parked.

Such a thing cannot go unpunished in this country…”
SILENCE OF THE LAMBS (AND LIONS)

Whatever you might think,
we all suffer whenever
there’s some kind of surplus.

Even too much knowledge
is not good.

That is why is like my friend.

Everything he says is short
and unclear.

Today, nobody has time
for longer explanations anyway ...

My friend doesn’t think he can
change anything with this writing,

but he won’t keep quiet either...

He redeems his soul with a line or two,
and then he moves on...

He just feels the need to provoke
with this comments...

And that’s what I like the most about him.

If he would insist more,
I would respect him less.

TO ALL TOMORROW’S POLITICAL PARTIES

They say
people need a Leader...
We had one for 40 years...

“You couldn’t hear his speech from the frantic applause,
and this made the audience even more ecstatic...”

Then we had another one for 10 years...

“He was flawless, too.
They explained me that. Several times.”

Now we change them every 4 years, but even that is not good enough...

I asked my friend:

“Which regime is worse? The new one or the old?

He replied – Yes.”

“The best government is the one that has yet to come... provided that it never comes.”

It is very simple:

“If everybody else agrees, I will also vote for change!”

In fact, “too bad that I don’t understand much about politics,

I would have had so many things to say...”
And since they are all switching sides all the time,
I wouldn’t know which one to challenge to a duel...

So I will gladly give up this choice to my dear and mean friend...

who can now finally say:

“At last, a new government.
This will be a real refreshment for our satire.”

16

\((2 + 2)/2009 =\)

“In socialism, 2 + 2 = 4.
In capitalism also.
But what a difference!”

When I understood this,
I ran to one of the 20 new banks in my street,

but there I met my Friend.

“I took a loan”, he said.
I am buying an apartment...

To my bank.”

“They really support the development of medium and small size companies...

They turned big ones into medium, and medium ones into small.”
And what is the State doing about all this, I asked my Friend?

"The State is introducing a tax on poverty. They say that's the only way to reduce the number of poor people."

"My Friend actually gives private classes on Marxism. He usually pays his pupils about 5 Deutschmarks per hour."

I asked him: What happened? Where is ‘the class enemy’ today?!

But he shrugged his shoulders and asked me quietly...

“Lend me, please, a thousand euros.

I will owe you forever!”

17

H2O MACHT FREI

This year again, we celebrated Labour Day for three days in a row.

The party was led, as usual, by those who can’t stand their jobs,
by those
who don’t have a job,

and by those
who are not even trying to find one.

Nobody noticed when my friend
picked up the microphone:

Comrades,

“The working class
is the skeleton of our system!”

“You are paid miserably!

But thankfully,
this doesn’t happen very often.”

“You bought university diplomas,

but you could have spent
your money on something smarter!”

“Your lives come down to this:

home - work,
home - work...

And to make things worse...

You have no home,
and you have no work!”

“How long have you been doing nothing,
if that’s not confidential information ?”

But nobody reacted,
so we had no one to argue with.

In the end, “my friend and I
went on a tourist trip abroad,
but we couldn’t find a job there either…”

18

CHARITY CORPORATION

In the distribution center for humanitarian aid,

my friend and I met some interesting people.

He eagerly started a conversation:

“I don’t care how your earned your first million.

That’s the last thing in my life I would have cared about.”

“I live only from humanitarian aid”, the manager’s assistant advisor replied.

“From wholesale, mainly…”

See, my friend told me later,

“I would never have said that he is a mafia guy.

Precisely because I know that he is one.”

And then he admitted himself:

“My wife and I are also organized criminals.

She steals bread in one shop, and I steal milk in another.”
But we are not complaining...

“The famous businessman is maybe rich and powerful...

but we are alive.”

19

HOLY CROSSWORDS

One day,
one man got ill

and went to the countryside to produced honey.

When he recovered,
he wanted to thank the bees

by making them hives
in the shape of his hometown.

He designed all the buildings except for the police and the town hall,

but in the end, he built only a church.

People have a deep belief

that something or someone will always save us...

“But people banalize God.

They downgrade him from a genius idea to a simple fact.”

“I am not a heretic...
I just can’t believe…
what’s going on around here…”

I trust that people do,
can and want to believe,

but for me,
nothing beats the first line:

“In the beginning,
there was the Word…”

20

JUDGMENT DAYS

Once upon a time,
there was a me…

“One upon a time,
there was a great man…

Twice upon a time,
he was gone.”

“There are also honest people,
but that’s their problem.”

They put me on trial,
nobody knew why…

Even “the verdict surprised everybody.
Especially the judge…”

As usual,
my friend tried to console me:

“The wheels of justice grind slow, he said,
…until they stop.”

But you know what?
"Reincarnation will finally allow
the Other side to be heard..."

21

THE MEDIA THINK LIKE ME

At least I am not hiding
behind the decadence of our times...

There should be
no generalizations...

No simple answers...

You can’t simplify the truth
without distorting it...

“But the truth will emerge,
sooner or later...

Like every drowned corpse.”

My friend and I
are very optimistic about that...

“The Truth will have no place to hide...
because it is not welcome anywhere.”

22

STRONGER THAN PARADISE

Of course you can’t understand
my satisfaction now,

when you’ve never been
despised like I was.
What doesn’t destroy you
only makes you stronger.

Those wounds are blessed.

Enlightening.

If I can't be invulnerable,
I will at least be indestructible.

But I’ve now become
invulnerable as well...

The world is worried about macrobiotics,
ecological standards, retirement funds,
scratches on their cars,
new holiday destinations...

And we?

We never manage to take advantage
of our tragicomedy...

“We couldn’t choose between
Eastern and Western civilization,
so we came to a compromise:
We will be uncivilized…”

“Why shouldn’t we be proud of our past,
when each new day is worse than the previous one?”

“We will not listen to the voice of reason,
because it is yelling at us.”

“We never take responsibility for our acts.
We are not a terrorist organization.”

Even “Shakespeare never said:
Something is rotten in the state of England…”
CAFÉ VS CAFFÉ

My final offer was
to challenge to a duel
either all of us
or all of you,
but I gave up when I realized
how sadly similar we all are...

Then one day,
my friend told me he was giving up.

He couldn’t make any more comments
because he had lost all inspiration.

Anyone can say or write
anything today...

Whatever you say, however
you say it, nothing changes.

“New times come,
old ones remain.”

I begged him to continue,
but in vain.

He said he lost motivation,
just like me.

That life itself had become
more absurd than satire.

I even tried to flatter him:

“Your half-truths
are like truths and a half...”
I repeat your sayings
as if they were my own...

Everything you say sounds exactly
like I would say it,

if I knew how to express myself!

I started thinking like you now...

I even look at things differently...

Well, if that is the case, he said,
then you don’t need me anymore.

If you cannot change things,
you can at least change the way
you look at things.

If you managed to do that,
it means you are doing fine.

24

FINALE

Listen, if you stop writing...

I will challenge YOU to a duel!

Why not?, he replied.

Should we do it at my place?

Ten

“Beware of people, my friend!
There are many of them who are just like you.”
“One should forgive his enemies, then destroy them as friends.”

Nine

Your turn now.

“The position of their spine is not very good.

But all their other positions are great!”

“I have a choice: I will either be a marionette or my life will hang by a thread.”

Eight

“We are in the same shit, but we arrived first.”

“We went through some tough moments before, but they never lasted this many years.”

Seven

“I am afraid that we will have a stormy past even in the future.”

“But relax. We are not facing ANY future.”

Six.

Don’t tell me you really wanted to stop writing?

You can’t stop writing.

And I couldn’t stop listening to you either...
What did you tell me the other day?

"It’s a dog’s life, But the bones are excellent."

"After the 7th glass, drink the 6th one.

After the 6th, drink the 5th one.

And so on, until you sober up."

**Five**

Your turn now, mister Me...

"We are sitting, quietly, just staring at a single spot, but it’s not there..."

"There might be those who think differently, but their numbers are insignificant compared to those who do not think at all."

**Four**

"Don’t waste your life away like that. Like this."

"It is true that we didn’t die, but it’s a lie that we’re still alive."
Three

“We can learn from our mistakes, especially if we celebrate them as holidays…”

“We learned from our mistakes, and perfected ourselves from our catastrophes…”

Two

“Finally, a light at the end of the tunnel. And not just one, but two!”

“The worst has not passed… The best is yet to come.”

One

The line I waited for all my life:

“EUREKA!

I don’t remember anything anymore.”

Zero

I looked at my friend in the mirror and we said to each other:

Louie, I think this is the end of a terrible animosity.

And you,

you must imagine
that I am a happy person.

...

If you don’t agree,
let’s take it outside...

(end)

Written by Boris Mitić,
featuring aphorisms from the Belgrade Aphoristic Circle
Did you ever believe a Chinese fortune cookie?

Of course not. They are as tasteless as they are dull, and their proverbial messages have been so much chewed upon that they've long lost any kind of truthful flavor.

CUT through time and space, here comes the new fast food prophecy – the Serbian satirical aphorism, postmodern style.

Just like a mix of cultures and torrents has shaped the delicious, highly caloric Serbian cuisine, so have the political and social circumstances in post-WWII Yugoslavia patched up another kind of fulfilling intellectual aphrodisiac - the one-or-two-liner aphorism, the best possible embodiment of Serbia's trademark ironic morale.

But first of all, a disclaimer. Most Westerners make the simplifying mistake of calling any proverb or famous literary quote - an aphorism. There are many web pages and anthologies of such 'false' aphorisms quoting what Plato and Chekhov said about their caves or theirs guns, or paraphrasing Murphy's laws and Chinese fortune cookie sayings.

An aphorism, as defined and practiced in Serbia, is a short, sharp, linguistically effective sentence or two, which imperatively contains an unexpected twist and which describes in a most striking, clairvoyant way the hidden truth of some common social matters or states of mind.

What makes Serbian aphorisms different from classic proverbs is their multilayered, ambivalent nature, their surprisingly creative wordplays, their unpretentious individualism and their killer dose of black humor, satire and merciless sarcasm that still conveys a strong humanistic message. They are open-ended, inciting audience participation, and unpretentiously individualistic, opting for unorthodox commentary instead of moralizing didactics.

Such satirical aphorisms appeared after WW2 in totalitarian countries of Eastern Europe where oppression was looser than elsewhere, namely in Poland and in the former Yugoslavia.

What started as an exercice de style of a few courageous writers quickly became picked up by ordinary people, and by the 1960s hundreds of amateur aphorists joined the movement, known in Serbia as the Belgrade Aphoristic Circle.

The main theme back then was an ironic criticism of the so-called “better life”, a leitmotiv of communist demagogy, which had to be done in a stylishly veiled, indirect way so as to avoid censorship. The main goal was to restore a sense of individuality, dignity and psychological integrity of a confused and misled population.

After the 1980s, the situation in Poland calmed down, but the bloody breakup of Yugoslavia provided Serbian aphorists with a variety of inspiring new topics: civil wars & civic rights, hyperinflation & hypermarkets, UN sanctions & peacekeeping missions, untouchable mafias & great dictators, endless transitions & democratic limitations…
In general, the more difficult and hopeless the times in which we live are, the more repression, stupidity and lie there is -- the more fertile and intense the spiritual resistance of the aphorists will be. This connection is strongly expressed by Aleksandar Baljak, Serbia's most prominent aphorist, when he ‘optimistically’ predicts: *Our best aphorisms were created in difficult times. For our modern satire, even better days lie ahead.*

A synthesis of literary art and colloquial philosophy, an aphorism reveals the depths of reality and discloses its true, ugly face. It has a demystifying, sobering role, but it also contains a concealed love and understanding for human misconceptions.

It is not a cheap thrill for the idle like a joke or a stand-up comedy one-liner, but a brave ethical act aimed at destroying everything that is unworthy, bad and fake in a society, but also inside ourselves.

This is why aphorisms can be a great way for empowering the individual; for asking or answering controversial questions; for accusing without moralizing; for apologizing without humiliating; for awareness raising; for self-criticism; for social introspection...

Aphorisms are inspiring both for those who make them and for those who read them. When you invent or hear such a fantastic diagnosis of a situation, you almost don’t care what happens next, because you are already sure that you have understood it all.

People in Serbia read affordable aphorism booklets in buses and waiting rooms, during lunch breaks or literary evenings, laughing on their own like happy lunatics. Aphorisms also appear in newspapers and radio shows, and the best ones get picked up in slang, graffiti, street protests or screenplay lines.

I myself have systematically collected aphorisms for the last ten years. Whenever I wonder why I am still living in this doomed country after years of civil wars, domestic repression and international satanization, I turn to my collection of aphorisms for reassuring consolation and a 100%-proof optimism fix.

Understanding the world around you, fighting back at the Gods with pen and paper, turning satire into a state of mind – it really means transcending it all. All of a sudden, a wasted childhood becomes an asset; terminal living in Serbia – a privilege.

From this perspective, Serbia stops being a traumatized, post-war country lost in transition, and turns into a stylish crossroads full of offbeat characters trying to contribute to a better understanding of this world by making up great lines.

These authors – vagabonds, politicians, psychiatrists, dentists, postmen, winemakers... - have no illusions that they can change anything, but they also can’t bear to stay idle, so they do a brilliant service to humanity – they make their ingenious comments public. If they can’t change the world around us, at least they can change our perception of this world. More than often, this is more than enough.
GOODBYE, HOW ARE YOU?
Examples of Serbian Satirical Aphorisms

My friend, beware of people!
There are many of them who are just like you.

At any given moment, we know what we want.
We just don't know when that moment is.

Is a new war possible?
I don’t know. All the previous ones were impossible.

In the upcoming period, we are expecting a lot from the probability theory. So far it failed us every time.

Don't leave me, people,
I am a charismatic person!

I realized that time was money.
I never have time to eat.

Serbs respect their enemy.
But above all, they respect their leader.

I am afraid of that man.
He worked again today.

In a fight with the police, a few demonstrators got minor injuries. The others got what they were looking for.

Stop! We will shoot! – the policemen warned the demonstrators. The demonstrators stopped.

The police fired warning shots in the air.
It’s not their fault that some demonstrators inhaled it.

The police fired in the air.
Several flying demonstrators died.

Protesters were brutally attacking, with their backs, the sticks of surprised policemen.

The Minister was sacked because the police fired at the demonstrators… during the president’s afternoon nap.

The policeman who beat up the demonstrator will be sacked, because an investigation revealed that he had never done such a thing before.

Some policemen don’t want to beat up people.
They would rather shoot.

We are pleased that you will once again become our traditional friends.

The truth will have no place to hide.
Because it is not welcome anywhere.

The war criminal has double-parked.
Such a thing cannot go unpunished in this country.

Nobody knows who fired first.
What’s sure is that they didn’t hesitate to shoot back.

The enemy surprised us again.
We expected that he would attack first!

After all the political confrontation it is time to return to normal life. War.

We are very worried about the young.
They want to take our jobs.

A nation that has such a wonderful youth should not worry about the future… Of Canada and Australia.

Do you have freedom of speech?
-Yes, I’d rather not talk about it over the phone.

Behind every successful man stands a woman who will know how to spend all the money.

Behind every successful man stands a woman who is working behind his back.

Behind every successful man lies a woman.

Being me, a successful man, stands a woman.
She wouldn’t sit down until I say so.

I took down the Leader’s portrait.
Now I am watching bare walls.

Fake patriotism is bothering me.
I love my country exactly because I don’t know why.
Learning from our mistakes, we learned to make mistakes.

We learned from our mistakes, and perfected ourselves from our catastrophes.

Don’t worry if you can’t live from the results of your work. Someone else can.

Intellectuals got bullets in the head. That’s how the brain drain started.

We bought more voters. At factory prices.

My wife and I are organized criminals. She steals bread in one shop, I steal milk in another.

We are the strongest when things are hard. But for us, everything comes easy.

We are justifying all our failures with our mentality. That’s what our mentality is like.

Today we gloriously uncovered the renovated cornerstone.

We want to build a civic society. We increased the number of undercover cops.

A dictator wants the same thing as the people: to decide everything by himself.

If everybody else agrees, I will also vote for change!

Only those who believed the rumors that there was not enough food died of hunger.

Poverty could be eliminated if a tax on it were introduced.

If someone had told me before that I would live like a dog, I would have bitten him!

The book is man’s best friend, said the dog, a bit tired of it all.

Our house was protected by the state. Until it collapsed.

My whole life comes down to this: home-work, home-work... And to make things worse -- I have no home, and I have no work.

All our neighbors live on the edge of an abyss.

When a policeman can’t remember something, he hits the first passer-by in the head.

Six characters – in uniform – looking for a writer.

As soon as the demonstrators started thinking about using stones, the police replied by using sticks.

Water canons – the drink of my youth!

The treatment of intellectuals has changed. They don’t beat them on the head anymore.

A person whose appearance has considerably changed after the interrogation must file for a new ID card.

When I returned from the interrogation, my mother recognized me right away. Her heart was telling her that was me.

Once upon a time there was a great man... Twice upon a time, he was gone.

I am the only person who can help you because I know a man who knows some people...

I don’t agree with you, but since I am a tolerant person, I will allow you the opportunity to agree with me.

One should forgive his enemies, then destroy them as friends.

When something is free, we want it at any cost.

When winter came, the cricket played the anthem.

When winter came, the cricket ate the ant.

Reincarnation would allow for the other side to be heard.
Finally, there was light at the end of the tunnel. Not one, but two…

You will have full freedom of speech. That will somewhat restrict your freedom of movement.

I have a choice:
I will either be a marionette, or my life will hang by a thread.

The enemy never sleeps. We are shelling him day and night.

The conflict could not have been avoided. You were fighting for peace, we were fighting against war.

We wanted the war to finish as soon as possible. That's why we started it first.

We won't hold our fire until the war is over. The longer the war, the closer we are to peace.

We will not announce the names of killed soldiers. They were all modest guys.

We have got our war assignments. We are to be the killed civilians.

The opposition had good results at the elections. No one got killed.

With the arrival of international observers, the number of our war crimes increased. We always liked to show off in front of strangers.

In the West, neighbors don't kill each other. They are terribly alienated.

The enemy bombarded the residence of our president, but when we needed him the most, the president was not at home.

Which one's worse, the old regime or the new one? - Yes.

How can we communicate when we are right, and you are in your swimming pools?

I am afraid that we will have a stormy past even in the future.

The distance between here and a brighter future can only be measured in light years.

A brighter future smiled on us, because we made it laugh.

Our future is traditionally bright.

Everybody is on our side. Except us.

I bought a university diploma, although I could have spent that money on something smarter.

In socialism two and two make four. In capitalism too. But what a difference!

I would never have said that he is a mafia guy. Precisely because I know that he is.

I don't care about how you earned your first million. That's the last thing in my life I would have cared about.

There are black sheep in every fold. But those are only initial results.

Our horses are more dangerous than Trojan ones. They are full of themselves.

We must not allow communism to return. It never went away, either.

Workers are paid miserably. Luckily, this doesn't happen very often.

The citizens greeted the liberators on the streets. All the houses were destroyed.

If people knew which one of the two candidates is worse, they would choose the better one.

It is true that we didn’t die, but it’s a lie that we’re still alive.

Of the two eyes in our head, one would always want to be on top.
We favor the development of small and medium enterprises. We turned big ones into medium, and medium ones into small.

It’s a dog’s life, but the bones are excellent.

The revolution eats up his children. What it doesn’t eat, quickly gets spoiled. Don’t despair if your wife cheated on you with your best friend. He is not your best friend.

There are also honest people, but that’s their problem.

Lose extra weight! Get rid of that brain!

We did a lot to make our jails more human. There is a doctor in the corner of each cell now. The Leader is casting the biggest shadow when he is at his peak.

We care about the safety of our soldiers. We gave gas masks and condoms to all of them.

Without regular power cuts, there won’t be enough electricity.

For politicians to get on the scene of the crime, they only need to make one step in any direction.

The government is winning the battle against poverty. Our ministers keep getting richer.

We learned from our mistakes, and perfected ourselves from our catastrophes.

“We’ll rob, rape and kill everyone. Does anyone have a better political program?”

You shouldn’t be thinking only about your past. Look at what we’re doing to you today!

We are ready to die for what we believe in, but thank God, we don’t believe in anything anymore.

I went on a tourist trip abroad, but I couldn’t find a job.

You are everything that we are not, but we are more original.

On the frontline, I behaved very humanely. I took care of a television set which lost everybody in this world.

We didn’t have any reason to slaughter each other. That motivated us even further.

As soon as we expelled them, we created conditions for their return. It is ridiculous to accuse us of having planned a genocide. We never plan anything in advance.

We hope that we will not go on trial for all the atrocities that we committed. It is human to have hope.

We never take responsibility for our acts. We are not a terrorist organization.

I read an gripping postmodern novel. All the time I feared that something would happen.

I cheated on my wife only once in my life. I regret this very much.

I found a woman that I just can’t live without. Wherever I run away, she always finds me…

Our chameleons are changing colors according to the biggest one.

The Minister is taking weekends off. That is his contribution in the fight against organized crime…

As soon as the Minister found out he was receiving a triple salary, he immediately drew up a budget to start an investigation.

We introduced democracy painlessly. We didn’t even feel it.

We have a high degree of democracy. On both Richter’s and Mercaly’s scale.

Democracy is when you can say what you don’t even dare to think about.

A young democracy embraced by old scums – what a perversion!

They are applying the “sticks and carrots” policy. First they beat us with sticks, then with carrots.

Every time I see you, you look better and better. How do you manage not to change?
The famous businessman is rich and powerful, but I am alive.

Hippocrates's oath implies that a doctor must help any patient regardless of the type of whiskey they bring as a gift.

Bring a gift to your doctor and don't forget – YOUR HEALTH IS IN YOUR HANDS.

A patient who doesn't know that a doctor needs to be bribed is a medical phenomenon.

I read aphorisms backwards. I want to know right away what will happen at the end.

This document certifies that the abovementioned is a politician and that he can't be used for any other purpose.

Dear liver, cheers!

Don't waste your life away like that. Like this.

We won't listen to the voice of reason, because it is yelling at us.

After the divorce, I returned to my wife. Even our divorce was a failure!

An honest man sleeps solemnly, but wakes up in a bad mood.

Those were happy days, when I waited, deeply unhappy, for happiness to come.

We are sitting, quietly, staring at a single spot, but even that we are not so sure about...

A friend is most recognizable in times of trouble. He is the most who celebrates the most.

When a man has friends, he doesn't even need enemies.

Some animals have human characteristics. The other ones I do like.

The best government is always the one that has yet to come, provided that it never comes.

The politicians have promised: We will live better! And they do live better.

Lend me, please, a thousand euros. I will owe you forever.

Once, I went so far into the future that I arrived at the beginning of the past.

Share your problems with your friends. They will feel much better…

I met my teacher after 30 years. I recognized him by his coat.

I don't think natural disasters will destroy our civilization. I believe in science…

Look at that tall, strong and beautiful man. That's what I look like!

The problem with foreigners is that they don't understand what's going on in this country, and we're not here to solve their problems.

We are in the same shit, but we arrived first!

What do you want now? You've already used your civic rights once!

Be what you are, just don't let them catch you!

You need a lot of imagination to understand our reality.

He who goes ahead of his time is closer to his grave.

The working class is the skeleton of our system.

We made a lot of mistakes. Please arrest those who voted for us.

Everything comes to an end, and so does a life sentence.

The truth will emerge, sooner or later. Like every drowned corpse.

After the 7th glass, I drank the 6th one. After the 6th, I drank the 5th. And so on, until I sobered up.

Eureka! I don't remember anything anymore!
GOODBYE, HOW ARE YOU?
Biographies of Featured Aphorists

ALEKSANDAR BALJAK, undisputed leader of the Belgrade Aphoristic Circle -- the informal, internationally praised collective of Serbian aphorists, active since the late 1970s. Currently lives in New Belgrade as the only full-time writer, editor and thinker of aphorisms. Two different eyes, one blue, one green.

Protesters were brutally attacking, with their backs, the sticks of surprised policemen.

SLOBODAN SIMIĆ, psychiatrist. Member of the aphoristic “Group 133”, named after Article 133 in the Yugoslav Law on Libel, which defined ‘verbal offense’. Refused to be drafted during the 1991-1995 Serbo-Croatian war and wrote two brilliant anti-war aphoristic books instead. Currently works as the Head of the Psychiatric Clinic at the Belgrade City Hospital, where he introduced the first regional Lighting Therapy Box for patients suffering from seasonal depressions.

He’s a successful politician.
He hasn’t been sentenced several times.

MILAN Todorov, Milosevic-era state-TV manager, sacked after the October 2000 protests, after which he turned to winemaking. Kept writing excellent anti-political aphorisms both before and after he was in a position of power.

Judging by your voice, I would say that you are not from around here.
Here nobody would dare to utter a single word.

ALEKSANDAR ČOTRIĆ, dissident turned minister. When he realized that satire cannot change things, he became politically active. Throughout the 1990s, he participated in endless and often violent street protests against strongman Slobodan Milošević. Later on, he spent seven years as deputy in the Serbian parliament and held various positions of power in the Belgrade City Council and in the Serbian government. Despite this reversal of fortune, he continues writing subversive aphorisms about politicians.

Why shouldn’t we be proud of our past when each new day is worse than the previous one?

NINUS NESTOROVIĆ, 2m tall, former football professional, hotel maid, hospital nurse, now a journalist at the state Customs Office magazine.

My wife and I are involved in organized crime.
I steal milk in one shop,
she steals bread in another.
RADE JOVANOVIĆ, former mountain resort manager, sacked because of political aphorisms, which made him turn to erotic ones.

She was the ideal hitch hiker. She never said stop!

MOMČILO MIHAJLOVIĆ, brilliant student who failed to materialize his talent. Works in a run-down photocopying shop in a Belgrade suburb, takes care of his fruit orchard and is a regular on horse races and underground caffé-boats on the Danube. His aphorisms are extremely dark and cynical compared to his personality, though he’d never admit he’s actually a very positive person.

The minister was astonished when he was told that he was receiving a triple salary. He immediately drew up a budget to start an investigation.

RAŠA PAPEŠ, child dentist from Kragujevac, the most black-humoured member of the Circle.

In our fairy tales every ending is possible, because Little Red Hood is as hungry as the wolf...

MIOBRAG MILOJEVIĆ alias IVA MAŽURANIĆ, barfly journalist from Kragujevac, enfant terible of the aphoristic movement, easier to find in the city taverns than on the phone.

When I see a destroyed mosque, I am ashamed to be a Serb. When, a bit further, I see a demolished church, I am again proud to be a Serb.

ILIJA MARKOVIĆ, economist from Novi Sad, northern Serbia. As a genuine fanatic whose self-proclaimed creative motto is “one aphorism per day”, he has published as much as 18 books so far, including some of the biggest bestsellers in the history of the genre – yearly office planners with daily aphorisms printed in dozens of thousands of copies and sold tax-free, since they were treated as regular books. In a typical megalomaniac endeavor, he even wrote a 300-page “novel in aphorisms”, a freestyle prose novel featuring only the author's aphorisms, both brilliant and below-average. The book is currently being adapted into a play at the National Theatre in Belgrade.

The worst has not passed. The best is yet to come.
DEJAN MILOJEVIĆ, veteran postman, very much in love in his job and with the human race. Also a regular at sports lotteries.

I was born into a poor family. My children can proudly say the same.

MILAN BEŠTIĆ, economist in a dying state-owned textile company, the most charismatic live performer of aphorisms.

I am giving Marxism lessons. I’m paying 5 deutschmarks per hour.

DRAGAN RAJIČIĆ, gas station worker from Kragujevac. A good man and an archetypical victim of economic transition.

Democracy is when you can say what don’t even dare to think about.

MILIVOJE RADOVANOVIĆ, lawyer from the small town of Svilajnac, in central Serbia. Banned from the courts during the 1990s. Lifelong enemy of the local strongman Bidza.

If we weren’t aware of our greatness, we too would be a small nation.

RASTKO ZAKIĆ, most prohibited satirical writer in Tito’s Yugoslavia, with seven banned books of aphorisms. In 1984, he published previously banished aphorisms once again, but in negation form, for which he got re-arrested. He defended himself in court by bringing in mathematicians and biologists trying to prove that he couldn’t be sued twice for two completely opposite things, but failed to convince the judges. The secret police eventually offered to clear him of all charges and even give him a high rank if he accepted to spy on his fellow aphorists and report them, which he agreed to, to their great surprise, but only if they gave him an uniform. In 2005, he published his 30th book of satire. He currently lives in Belgrade, taking care of his grandchildren.

The working class is the skeleton of our system.
VESNA DENČIĆ, webmaster, voluntary editor of the satirical online monthly ETNA (www.aforizmi.org/etna, 100+ issues so far), former director of a matchmaking agency and jewelry dealer. Extremely positive despite a severe physical handicap, she urges her colleagues to write more and changes her hairstyle on a daily basis.

We have finally changed the regime.
It will be a real refreshment for the satirists.

VLADIMIR JOVIĆEVIĆ JOV, chess master, film buff, boem, veteran of the Belgrade Aphoristic Circle.

Shakespeare never said:
“Something is rotten in the state of England”.

ĐORĐE OTAŠEVIĆ, prolific linguist and publisher. Author of the upcoming “Encyclopedia of aphorisms in 50 volumes”, currently published at the rate of one volume per year.

This year Santa was quite good…
but the reindeer were a bit chewy.

ZORAN RANKIĆ, actor at the National Theatre in Belgrade, but agoraphobically unwilling to socialize or participate in the activities of the Belgrade Aphoristic Circle, despite being one of its most creative members.

The book is the man’s best friend,
said the dog, visibly exasperated.

VITOMIR TEOFILOVIĆ, literary expert, master of wordplays and linguistic aphorisms.

Individuals make a society.
Society makes it up to individuals.

DRAGUTIN KARLO MINIĆ, editor of the satirical page in Politika, the oldest newspaper daily in the Balkans. Handles daily dozens of weird letters, some even perfumed, sent by readers supplying their own aphorisms.

We are now a peaceful nation
proud of our warrior tradition.

RADIVOJE BOJIĆIĆ, editor of “The Bald Hedgehog”, the Serbian cult satirical magazine first released in 1935. During WW2, it was published handwritten in a Nazi concentration camp. During the shortages of the 1990s, it was printed on bread bags, tramways and street tv monitors.

A Serb is as efficient in his leisure time
as a Japanese is during working hours.
MILOVAN VRŽINA, deputy editor of “The Bald Hedgehog”.

Slow down, please!
Serbia is in a hurry!

SVJETLANA RAŠIĆ, financed the printing of her book of erotic aphorisms by working as a copywriter in an erotic hotline company. She’s now the top regional ghost-writer of kitsch romantic novels, to which she always adds a progressive feministic touch. Lives in a small village 50 km south of Belgrade with a conservative husband who doesn’t even know their daughter is singing in riverboat restaurants.

I would sacrifice my autonomy for such an anatomy!

DEJAN TOFČEVIĆ, beekeeper and air-traffic controller at the Podgorica airport.

The police was the first to arrive on the scene of the crime.
It was waiting for the victim.

Colonel VLADISLAV VLAHOVIĆ, Tom Cruise look-alike, but 2m tall. Helicopter pilot, former Military Attache in London, now Aviation Commander of the Montenegrin Army.

When you hear gunshots, duck.
Nobody has any reason to celebrate around here.

BOŽO MARIĆ and JOVO NIKOLIĆ, professors of history and math from Republika Srpska, the Serbian part of Bosnia. Both have spent four years on the frontlines during the war in Bosnia, during which they actively wrote aphorisms.

The enemy is using dirty tricks.
He’s putting women, children and house appliances in the first fighting rows.

The police fired warning shots in the air.
It’s not their fault that some demonstrators inhaled it.

**IN MEMORIAM**: Dragan Šušić, Vladan Sokić, Vuk Gligorijević, Alek & Bodin Marjanović, Vib, Minimaks, Svrzis, Duško Radović, Mile Stanković…

A nation which has a government like this deserves an even worse one,
but that’s theoretically impossible.

We’ve had some hard moments before,
but they never lasted this many years.
GOODBYE, HOW ARE YOU?
director’s biofilmography

Biography:
b. 1977 in Leskovac, southern Serbia.

Lived on a few continents, graduated in mass communication, settled back in Belgrade, fought a war, worked for 5 years for top-level international media, understood some things and dedicated the rest of his life to his family, football and creative documentaries.

His three films were shown at 150+ festivals around the world, received 18 awards and were broadcasted on 25 international TV channels.

Lectures at film schools in Europe, China, the US and the Middle East.

Started a new 5-year documentary project about Nothing.

Filmography:

PRETTY DYANA (2003)
UNMIK TITANIK (2004)
GOODBYE, HOW ARE YOU? (2009)

All three written, filmed, edited, directed and produced by Boris Mitić.

www.dribblingpictures.com
“PRETTY DYANA” – a gypsy recycling saga

“One of the two funny films this year at IDFA” – Peter Wintonick

“If Mitic had focused only on the terrible misery these people live in, the film would have been unbearable. Instead, you never know whether you should cry after you laugh, or the other way around.”

– Sara Hultman, Goteborg Film Festival

“The most copied film on the Balkan black market” – Nacional weekly, Croatia

Synopsis: An intimate look at Gypsy refugees in a Belgrade suburb who make a living by transforming Citroën’s classic 2cv and Dyana cars into Mad Max-like recycling vehicles, which they use to collect cardboard, bottles and scrap metal. These modern horses are much more efficient than the cart-pushing competition, but even more important -- they also mean freedom, hope and style for their crafty owners. Even the car batteries are used as power generators in order to get some light, watch TV and recharge mobiles! Almost an alchemist’s dream come true! But the police doesn’t always find these strange vehicles funny…

Main festivals & awards: Amsterdam (IDFA), Goteborg Film Festival, Belgrade Docs&Shorts, Documenta Madrid, RomaDocFest (audience award), Pula Film Festival, Sarajevo Film Festival (human rights award), Dokufest Prizren (best documentary), Dokument2 Glasgow, Docupolis Barcelona, Zagreb Film Festival, Astra Film Fest Sibiu (best central & eastern european documentary), Cinemambiente Torino, Jihaiva Documentary Festival, DokMa Maribor, Tirana Film Festival, Budapest Versions Festival, Gypsy Film Festival Skopje (best screenplay), Belgrade EthnoFilmFest (new ethno award), Berlin Europe in Motion, Solothurn Film Days, World Social Forum Porto Alegre, 1001 Documentary Film Festival Istanbul, Bilan du cinéma ethnographique Paris, Mar del Plata Film Festival, Fair Film Festival Teheran, Wiesbaden Go East Film Festival (best documentary), Ecocinema Athens, Ecofilms Rhodes, Ecocine Salvador de Bahia, Mediawave Gyor (best documentary), Tartu WorldFilm Festival, Cronograf Doc Festival Chisinau (UNICEF prize), Yerevan Film Festival, DerHumAlc Argentina, Valdivia Film Festival Chile, Sucre Film Festival Bolivia, Meetings in Siberia Novosibirsk (best film), Kansas City Film Festival, Karachi Film Festival, Jeevika Film Festival New Delhi (special mention), Tampere Film Festival, London Gypsy Film Festival, Other Worlds Are Breathing Tour (Denmark, Australia, India, Kenya), South-East European Film Fest Los Angeles, Riddu Riddu Fest Tromso, Refugee Film Festival Tokyo & Cairo, San Gio Fest Verona (best social documentary), Urban TV Festival Madrid (best film), DOCSDF Mexico City, Migration Fest Taiwan, Watch Docs Warsaw, New York Gypsy Film Festival, Srebrenica Doc Film Festival…

Screened in theatres: Italy (Docume Network; Ecocinema), Croatia (Clubture – 15 cities), Amsterdam (Rialto), Berlin (Babyton Mitte), London (Blue Elephant), Vienna (Film Archiv, Top Kino), Ljubljana (Kino Dvor), Bern (Lichtspiel), Salzburg (Romavideodrom), Belgrade (Kinoteka, Dom Omladine, DKSG), Emir Kusturica’s Mokra Gora Film Village…

Broadcasters: SVT, UR (Sweden), YLE FST (Finland), ARD/BR (Germany), RTSI (Switzerland), RAI 3 (Italy), ERR (Estonia), LTV (Latvia), TV Slovenia, HRT (Croatia), RTRS, BHT1, FTV (Bosnia), Kanal5 (Macedonia), B92 & 24 local TV stations (Serbia), Top Channel (Albania), Al Jazeera English (satellite)

Contact: Boris Mitic (director & producer), 00.381.63.7715.241
info@dribblingpictures.com, www.dribblingpictures.com

Filmed, edited, directed and produced by Boris Mitic
© 2004 Dribbling Pictures

SCREENING FORMAT : DIGIBETA / BETA SP, 45 min.
In Serbian, with English, French, Italian, Spanish or German subtitles

www.dribblingpictures.com
The story of 100 people trapped inside one building for more than 4 years. The story of yet another failed UN peacekeeping mission: Kosovo.

"Fahrenheit UN!" – Peter Wintonick, HOT DOCS/IDFA

“Painfully bitter, refreshingly authentic!” – VEČERNJE NOVOSTI

“A beckettesque low-fi Kosovo reality show!” – TOTAL FILM

Synopsis:


500 000 Albanians. 5 000 peacekeepers. The last 100 Serbs – all trapped inside one building.

Downtown. Four years and counting.

Waiting for Santa Claus - or for the largest UN mission to succeed…

Welcome to the “Yu Program” bunker-palace-hotel.

Where else would you spend New Year’s Eve?

Festivals:

Amsterdam IDFA, RomaDocFest (special jury mention), Documenta Madrid, Politically Incorrect Film Festival Ljubljana, Sofia Festival of European co-productions, Belgrade Documentary Film Festival,

Yerevan Film Festival, Meetings in Siberia Novosibirsk (best film), Document3 Glasgow (opening film),

Films South Asia Kathmandu/Nepal, Balkan Black Box Berlin (Golden Black Box – best documentary),

Budapest Versions 2 Festival, One World Film Festival Pristina, DOCSDF Mexico City,

Migration Film Festival Taiwan, Human Rights in Film Warsaw, Srebrenica Doc FF…

Filmed, edited, written, directed and produced by Boris Mitić

Music: Boris Kovač, Boban Marković Brass Orchestra

© Dribbling Pictures / Boris Mitić 2004

World Premiere: Amsterdam (IDFA) 2004

Completed with the support of IDFA’s Jan Vrijman Fund

TV premiere: B92, Jan 1, 2006

DIGIBETA, 56 min

In Serbian, with English, French or Italian subtitles

Additional information and promo material available on the website

www.dribblingpictures.com
“GOODBYE, HOW ARE YOU?” – a satirical documentary fairy tale

“A chaptered film essay of highest originality. I feel like I do when I have seen a play of Samuel Beckett, provoked and entertained in a creative way. Want to see it again. Bravo!” – Tue Steen Miller

“The beautifully selected and wittily juxtaposed images form an insightful, compelling portrait of daily existence in all its banalities, extremes and ironies. With shades of Patrick Keiller and Chris Marker, this collage of ideas is both thought-provoking and darkly comic.” – Edinburgh Film Festival

“Soaked in satire, both visually and intellectually, this offbeat introduction to Serbian aphorisms is a rallying cry for us to refresh our jaded perspective.” – Dok.Fest Munich

Synopsis: The Wittiest, blackest satirical aphorisms of the modern era are saluted in this entertaining Serbian travelogue detailing how citizens use language to critique – and resist – the madness of politics. A fascinating essay film in the tradition of Chris Marker and Jean-Luc Godard, and a primer on Balkan intellectual thought, resistance, and history.

Main festivals & awards: DOCSDF Mexico City (Best Mid-length Doc), Mediawave FF Hungary (Grand Prix), DokMa Maribor (Best Mid-length Doc), Soleluna FF Palermo (Most Innovative Film), EcoFilms Rodos (Audience Award), Dallas Videofest (Best Feature-Length Doc), Iasi FF (Best Documentary), Uruguay FF (Jurys Mention), Documenta Madrid (Jurys Mention), Deboshir FF St.Petersburg (Jurys Mention), AFI Silverdocs, Edinburgh FF, Abu Dhabi FF, Yerevan FF, Sarajevo FF, Huesca FF, Go East Wiesbaden FF, Motovun FF, Parnu FF, Cork FF, Dok.Fest Munich, Docupolis Barcelona, Dok.Leipzig, Jihlava Doc FF, DMZ Docs Korea, Anuu-ru Aboro FF New Caledonia, RIDM Montreal, Meetings in Siberia FF, Sofia FF, Dokfest Prizren, One World FF Bucharest, Play-Doc Tui, Ljubljana Doc FF, London Doc FF, Al Jazeera Doc FF, Planete Doc Warsaw, Docstow FF Mexico, Documentarist Istanbul, MakeDox Skopje, Underhill FF Podgorica, Jerusalem FF, Aye Aye FF Nancy, Bratislava FF, TIDF Taiwan, Hot Springs Doc FF, St. Louis FF, Listapad FF Minsk, Tirana FF, Kustendorf FF...

Broadcasters: ARTE / MDR (Germany, France), YLE (Finland), SVT (Sweden), IBA / Channel 1 (Israel), TV Catalunya (Spain), Cape Town TV (South Africa), ERR (Estonia), RTRS (Bosnia), HRT (Croatia), RTV Slovenia

Distribution contact: Boris Mitic (director & producer), 00.381.63.7715.241, skype: borismitic info@dribblingpictures.com, www.dribblingpictures.com

Written, filmed, edited, directed and produced by Boris Mitic

Co-editing: Aleksandar Uhrin. Sound mix: Ivan Uzelac

Featuring aphorisms from The Belgrade Aphoristic Circle

Narrated by Nebojsa Glogovac. Music by Pascal Comelade

A Dribbling Pictures production, in association with ARTE, MDR, YLE, SVT, the Serbian Film Center, the Serbian Ministry of Culture and the City of Belgrade

SCREENING FORMAT : HDCAM / DIGIBETA / BETA SP, 56/60 min.

In Serbian, with English, French, Russian, German, Spanish, Catalan, Hebrew or Arabic subtitles
GOODBYE, HOW ARE YOU?
selected reviews

EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (JUNE 18-27)
Tag line: Jokes as a weapon of resistance: How satire sustains a beleaguered culture

This unique documentary draws on dark-humored aphorisms from the last 40 years of Serbian history for its narrative voiceover: a nation's new oral tradition of sardonic response to conflict and corruption. The beautifully selected and wittily juxtaposed images, meanwhile, form an insightful, compelling portrait of daily existence in all its banalities, extremes and ironies. With shades of Patrick Keiller and Chris Marker, this collage of ideas is both thought-provoking and darkly comic.

Piercingly poignant, yet tinged with an acid sense of humor, Goodbye, How Are You? combines a portrait of a splintered society with a voiceover drawn from cynical Serbian adages addressing political corruption and the ravages of war. The film's visual imagery – comprising evocative landscape shots, witty juxtapositions and scraps of news footage – forms an incisive, thoughtful portrait of an environment altered by conflict. Exquisite homes stand empty, relics of antebellum affluence. Police beat back a wave of demonstrators, in an image so massed with moving bodies that it resembles a close-up of a microscope slide. A tiny girl walks casually between two soldiers, bearing a bag of bread: nothing strange to her about big guns cropping up on the grocery route.

The voiceover, meanwhile, deploys the Serbian convention of dry aphorisms to pass indirect comment upon the images. "They are applying a sticks and carrots policy with us," notes the unseen narrator. "First they beat us with sticks, then with carrots." It's a sad, clever new take on the impact of war upon culture, at once terribly sorrowful and slenderly optimistic. The people might be beaten down, but resistance sustains through language: not rabble-rousing slogans, but self-deprecating asides acknowledging both the abuse of power and passivity of an intellectual elite taking refuge in irony.

Our witty tour guide – a Balkan cousin to the nameless protagonist of Patrick Keiller's classic essay films London (1994) and Robinson in Space (1997) – declares himself nostalgic for the simpler days when one could settle a grievance with a duel; but with old-fashioned matters like honor and dignity besmirched by protracted bloodshed, he opts instead to fight his battles on the level of language. Whether waxing subversive or simply misanthropic, his is an important voice: it speaks up for the freedom conferred by a healthy skepticism and a resilient sense of humor.

ABU DHABI INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (OCT 8-17)

"The best government is the one that has yet to come, provided it never comes," according to an old Serbian saying, one of many featured in this entertaining, intellectually engaging essay-film about how citizens use language to critique - and resist - the politics, governments, and utter madness that surrounds them. Filmmaker Boris Mitić gathers the best political aphorisms from Serbian and Yugoslavian life (which features no shortage of war and insanity), with "their killer dose of black humor, satire and merciless sarcasm." As one citizen says, "The longer the war, the closer the peace." Another counters, "We are all in the same shit, but we arrived first."

The film's unseen "host," a jaded descendant of Dostoevsky's Underground Man, narrates Mitić's astonishing visuals, drawn from odd archives and a personal road trip through modern-day Serbia. Continuing the essay-film tradition of Chris Marker, Harun Farocki, and Jean-Luc Godard, Goodbye is a primer on Balkan resistance and history yet universal in its homage to language and subversion.

DOK.FEST MUNICH (MAY 6-13)
Soaked in satire, both visually and intellectually, this offbeat introduction to Serbian aphorisms is a rallying cry for us to refresh our jaded perspective....

Had enough of fortune cookies and tired proverbs? Let us introduce you to the world of Serbian aphorisms, sharp, witty observations which provide the perfect antidote to everyday life. Our unseen Narrator is a jaded hero for our times, prepared to die for his beliefs if only he could find something to believe in... His last motivation is to choose how to die, so he challenges various opponents, as diverse as society is flawed, to absurd duels; honest politician, redeemed war criminal, hypocritical moralist, irresponsible parent, ungrateful child... However, after each duel aphoristic punch lines, possibly spoken by his own alter ego, deconstruct his opponents until they become obsolete, leaving the narrator himself as his only worthy opponent.

The best Serbian aphorisms of the last 50 years are complemented by "satirical documentary footage" shot over a 3-year Balkan road trip, with references from everything from "Fight Club" to "Don Quixote", by way of our own lives.

DOK LEIPZIG (OCT 26-NOV 1)
Serbian filmmaker Boris Mitic's satirical documentary fairytale is a masterful representation of the fine arts of misanthropy and black humor.

The first person narrator stays off screen all through the film. His voice is a sonorous basso. Post-war images, violent police officers and scenes of a baptism, romantic piano tunes and, floating above all that, the narrator who introduces himself as a hero of our time in the style of Mikhail Lermontov's autobiographical novel. Like the other hero, he is a young man whose talents are bound to whither in the dull social atmosphere surrounding him. He wants to challenge the self-styled leaders of his epoch – the humane executive, the honest politician, the reformed war criminal – to duels. But he fails in the run-up every time, because his friend, alter ego and second has always just shot down the desired opponent with a denigrating aphorism: “We know what we want at every moment. But we don't know when this moment comes.” At the end, there is only one worthy opponent left for this hero of our time: himself. Filmed and collected on countless journeys across the Balkans over a period of three years, this is subversive everyday philosophy posing as reliable self-help: “Everyone is on our side, except us.”

RENCONTRES INTERNATIONALES DU DOCUMENTAIRE DE MONTREAL (NOV 11-21)
A 3-year adventure. 50,000 clicks in the Balkans. 400 clichés. 1 narrator who doesn't believe any of it. 100s of images and stories reminiscent of a Chris Marker collage. 1 incisive portrait of a world in transition. 60 minutes of laughter and thought. 1 brave hero with no one to fight. Oh, and aphorisms—too many to count. An absurd, irreverent fairy tale about love, life, politics and war, Goodbye, How are You? stakes out a brilliant return to the field of avant-garde documentary film by Serbian writer and director Boris Mitic.
CORK FF (NOV 2-8)
Goodbye, How Are You? is a superb satirical documentary detailing a fractured society with a narration taken from the Serbian convention of dry aphorisms to address the effects of war and widespread political corruption. Aided and abetted by a witty tour guide opting to choose his battles on the field of language instead of war, his monologues are the voice of freedom heard through the prism of a healthy skepticism and a never-failing sense of self-deprecating humor. A fascinating essay-film in the style of Chris Marker and Jean-Luc Godard, director Boris Mitic has created an unforgettable visual aphorism detailing resistance to the madness of modern-day politics.

TUE STEEN MILLER, Filmkommentaren.dk

It is one of those films where you are attracted by the visual and the tone of the film and the words, in other words by the film, and still feel like you want to watch and listen again. Because you did not get it all. Being a chaptered film essay of highest originality, with funny playful captions, you can actually do your re-view by clicking your remote control. To pick the chapters. And you can visit the (also) rich website to get on your screen the aphorisms. Simply to read what you heard.

I say so because it is a difficult film for someone from outside of Serbia and ex-Yugoslavia to fully recognize and sense the constant dialogue between image and words. Much is archive from places and demonstrations, and conflict and war situations. Also from today, also from Kosovo, but also here you have to give up sometimes as you don’t have the references in your visual memory. At the same time as the images and the tone and the words keep your attention the whole way through.

Nevertheless, let me skip the eternal (Nordic?) rational wish to understand everything... there is so much to discover in this ambitious journey in absurdity and subtlety where you are taken by the hand by a “me”, the voice of an old man, who is summarizing his life and talks about his friend and about the duels he would love to have. With other people and with himself. My Serbian language knowledge does not exist but the voice of the old man sets me in the mood of laughing of what is being said and what I watch. But not only laughing. There is also a sadness, a sad wisdom I would call it, from the writers and philosophers, who have inspired director Boris Mitic for making this clever satirical catalogue of image & words. It took him “4 years of travelling 50,000 km along Balkan side roads to make 400 shots” for a story and a visualization to which there is but one thing to say: Good Day, I am fine. I saw your film. I feel it like I do when I have seen a play of Samuel Beckett. Provoked and entertained in a creative way. Want to see it again. Bravo!

The film is supported by arte, MDR and YLE and Serbian public sources. And you will meet it at international festivals.

“Beautiful strong free film.” – Evgeny Alexandrov, Russian Institute of Anthropology

“So sobering! So optimistic!” – Majda Gandar, TV Slovenia

“The most objective documentary I have ever seen.” – Gena Teodosievska, MKTV Macedonia

“A fucking critique… of fucking everything!” – Teenage viewer at Sarajevo Film Festival