

CINETRAIN TORINO-ISTANBUL, interview with tutor Boris Mitić

1. You never actually wanted to be a filmmaker, but filmmaking found its way to you, how did this happen? How old were you when you quit your dayjob?

For me, filmmaking was a kind of a natural development, it was not an ego decision or a child fantasy. I came to documentary filmmaking after aborting a very well paid journalistic job, after five years of high profile journalism. I was 27 at the time.

2. While shooting your first film, „Pretty Dyana”, you were not aware that you were making a film, right?

I was only recording souvenir footage from these cool gypsy neighbors that I discovered and befriended. I didn't have even a small photo camera, so I filmed on video, first time in my life. I installed a pirated copy of Adobe Premiere 6.5 on my Pentium III and started putting images together. People liked them but they kept wanting more information, so I returned to filming until they had no more questions about the material, until the story was self-explanatory. It was pure instinct.

3. Your technique for making movies seems to be best described with the word *bricolage*. Do you think that this is something that can be taught in the conventional education system?

Bricolage is a question of character, of improvising, of learning by doing and of learning to bluff yourself that all is going well. „Pretty Dyana” was pure improvisation; „Goodbye, How Are You?”, my last film, was also bricolage, but with a very clear idea that took four years to build.

Documentary bricolage is like building a Lego set with a huge box of bricks, but without a clear blueprint to start with. Some kids need instructions, others are able to improvise. It is good to acknowledge the instructions, but if you can't improvise, you will lose. In my first film I was not conscious about “the blueprint” and I did it. In my last film I was very conscious about it and I did it.

The difference between my first film and my last film is that I went to a film academy in the meantime, to my own film academy. I think film schools are very much curriculum based. They have certain topics and exercises that you must become familiar and then you get a piece of paper saying that you did it.

Bricolage is something that you learn by doing. Better yet, in an unrestricted environment. Film schools are restricted, especially by time. When I think back now, I see that I was successful because I gave it all the time it needed. For „Pretty Dyana,” it was one year of casual filming in my neighborhood. With „Goodbye, How Are You” I kept resetting the story back to the beginning and starting from scratch many times, until I got to the final result, five years in total. So, time is something that is an important element of bricolage learning, and that's something that you usually don't have in a film school. Or in

commissioned projects, like *Istanbul Express*. How can you enter a new city, feel the city and film something meaningful in less than 48 hours? It's such a short time, that you almost take it as an exercise only, a play with limitations. Like a blitz chess game, you make many mistakes, but you have to think and react fast. In real life, I like to take all the time that the film needs. This is something that classical film producers or film schools are usually not very happy with.

4. Would you agree with the concept that some people are just naturally talented?

No. Especially in documentary filmmaking, you need two things. First, a rich life experience, or at least a very broad, humanistic understanding of life, in all its good and dark sides. Second, you also need to master the craft of not just filmmaking, but of *documentary* filmmaking. For this you need to have natural empathy, willingness of character, readiness to face the unpredictable, to adapt to many new situations, and to be a very good colloquial diplomat, in the sense of knowing how to communicate with many different kinds of people in a compassionate way, unlike the journalists, who do it in a vulturous, opportunistic, snobbish, patronizing or pitying way. Talent is really like a very small contribution to all this, I would even say that talent is often disguised as your subconscious apprehension of your personal film or general arts baggage. In my case, no one was ever close to doing arts or film in my family, but they were generally quite appreciative of the arts.

5. What about the student selection process in film schools, do you think it is possible to judge if the person has what it takes in, let's say, a week?

I think that the moment when people really decide to become filmmakers varies from person to person. Some authors have always wanted to be filmmakers and have devoted their lives to it. Others, like me have done many other things, and came to filmmaking in a natural way, by realizing that this is the best way for them to express themselves, to do a job that they like and to do it regardless of potential successes or failures. I never made any calculations in that sense. But to answer your question, it all depends on how people react to their first real filmmaking experiences. Everyone should be given a chance, much more freshman filmmakers should be admitted to film schools than now. The real selection would be made later. This selection depends on how much the students can take out of filmmaking and how much filmmaking can take out of them. If they don't want to grow as individual people and authors, if they don't want to push filmmaking to higher levels, then this is where you should make the cut. Already now we have enough standard, routine filmmakers who can execute filmmaking assignments on any level. I really think film schools should create authors, not technicians.

6. What about discipline, I find that this is the thing that a school teaches mostly.

In my case the motivation and discipline comes from the fact that I'm only making my own films and films which I really stand behind with full integrity. I don't do any other assignments - commercials, commissioned things or music videos. I think that discipline is a question of personal character, which is

possible to achieve even without school. Film school for me is more about inspiration. If you're lucky enough to come across teachers who can inspire you, then it was worth going to school. Otherwise, if you don't have that spark inside you lit up, it was a waste of time.

The other thing why school is useful is to find collaborators. There is a great concentration of people whom you can potentially work, grow and develop with. That's maybe the only thing that I'm missing in my way of filmmaking. I am a one-man band, I have trouble delegating my jobs to other people, because it would take a lot of explaining and fine tuning to get to the same frequency, to develop the same understanding, visual language or emotional balance. If you spend a lot of time together, grow together in a school, there is a good chance that you'll work together for a long time.

7. You give lectures titled "What they don't teach in film school" worldwide. How was this born?

I started taking notes of many things, almost everything, a long time ago. Recently, I took a year off to reorganize and crosslink all these notes, because everything we read or learn, we do it in a very disposable way. We treat our own knowledge like fast food, we don't recycle it. When I present my lectures, I am saying nothing new, but I am saying it in a way that makes people remember and understand certain connections. Of course, I am mostly interested in making movies, but lecturing can only contribute to my filmmaking. One day it could be a more serious source of income, but even if it doesn't, I'll be a little bit better as a filmmaker and a whole lot better as an intellectual person in any case.