EDITH RUSS HAUS

shadow citizens

želimir žilnik

Sternberg Press

FRONT COVER
Milja Vujanović in *Early Works*, 1968.

BACK COVER
Marko Nikolić and Milja Vujanović
in *Early Works*, 1968.

FRONT MATTER
Milja Vujanović in *Early Works*, 1968.

PHOTOS: ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

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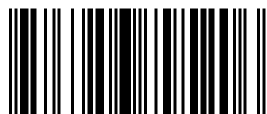

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EDITH
RUSS
HAUS for Media Art

shadow citizens

želimir žilnik

OLDENBURG • BERLIN • NOVI SAD • ZAGREB

LEFT TO RIGHT Bogdan Tirnanić, Marko Nikolić, Čedomir Radović, and Želimir Žilnik on the set of *Early Works*, 1968. PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

Piroška Čapko in
Little Pioneers (film still), 1968

11 EDIT MOLNÁR & MARCEL SCHWIERIN
A Radical, Pragmatic Humanist

17 WHAT, HOW & FOR WHOM / WHW
Želimir Žilnik — Shadow Citizens

25 ŽELIMIR ŽILNIK & WHW
In Conversation, April 2018

41 BERT REBHANDL
The Borders of Paradise:
Želimir Žilnik between Artistic Strategies and Political Systems

63 BORIS BUDEN
Shoot It Black!
An Introduction to Želimir Žilnik

89 DIJANA JELAČA
Double Binds: The Politics of Gender and Sexuality in the Films of Želimir Žilnik

103 ANA JANEVSKI
The Dancing Paradox:
On Movement, Dance, and Bodies in Želimir Žilnik's Films

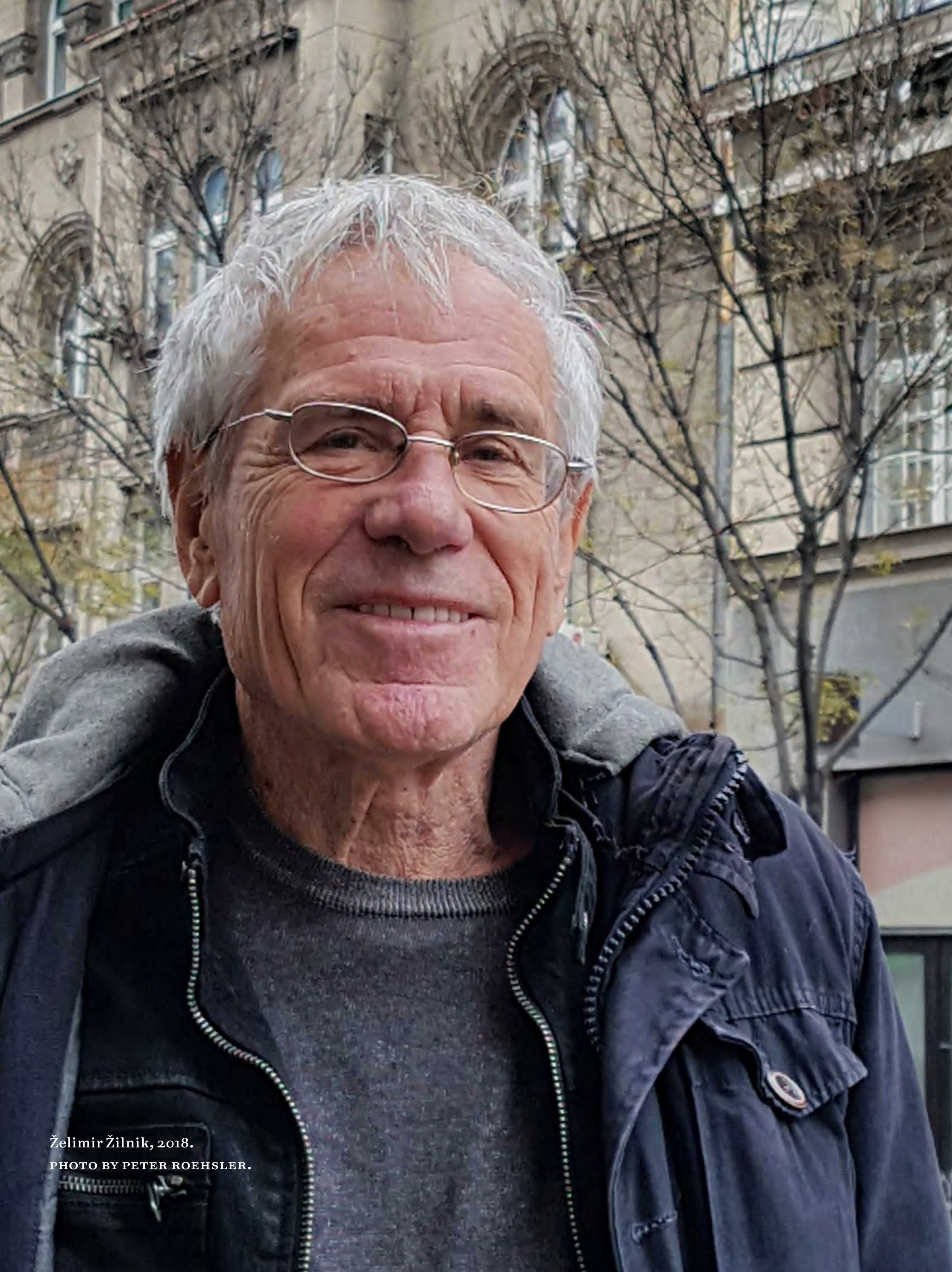
117 GREG DE CUIR JR
Black Soil

132 Biography

140 Filmography

147 Black Film Manifesto

152 Early Works — Photo Essay from *ROK* Magazine



Želimir Žilnik, 2018.
PHOTO BY PETER ROEHSLER.

I make movies because we're still not in communism. I make movies to warn about how many things we still need to do in order to get there. I am not interested in art film. When it comes to documentary film, we really don't have time to talk about art. The documentary film is, primarily, a possibility given to a man, a woman, or a child to impart in one breath the pain that sits in one's stomach, and which obviously is not only their own private thing. This "possibility," this is actually the sensitivity of silver bromide to light, and nearly all the rest I leave up to the personalities that my documentaries are concerned with.

—Želimir Žilnik, interview, "Art Film Does Not Interest Me,"
Susret, April 5, 1968.

Logbook_Serbistan (on-set photo), 2014.
PHOTO BY ORFEAS SKUTELIS.

EDIT MOLNÁR & MARCEL SCHWIERIN

A Radical, Pragmatic Humanist

During the first stages of our planning for an exhibition of Želimir Žilnik's work, we were faced with the realization that Žilnik's oeuvre is certainly well known in the film world, but almost not at all in a fine art context. However, his artistic methods of social intervention and participatory dialogue with his protagonists, along with his combination of the fictional and the documentary, are crucial strategies in contemporary art. Žilnik developed these methods as early as the 1960s and has continued to use them with unique determination over the ensuing decades. In other words: especially from the perspective of fine art, there is much to discover in Žilnik's practice.

We find three central moments to be particularly defining for his work.

The first is his profound and personally lived humanism. Žilnik likes people. He does not shy away from those who have been shut out by society or who have notions about human coexistence that are completely different from his own. He not only makes his protagonists the heroes of their own stories but also turns them into creative narrators, thus breaking with the classic power imbalance between the people behind and in front of the camera. This artistic approach, which is already alluded to in his first films, like *A Newsreel on Village Youth, in Winter* (1967) and *The Unemployed* (1968), came to fruition in the *Kenedi* trilogy (2003–07). Questions concerning the representation of protagonist-collaborators and their share of autonomy in the work's creation is presently being intensely discussed in the art world and forms the foundation for numerous contemporary artistic approaches. Žilnik was far ahead of his time in this regard.

As friendly as Žilnik is to people, he is just as harsh in his critique of the social conditions that exclude his protagonists. Žilnik has worked under many different political systems and has constantly come into conflict with them. He never allows himself to be fenced in, neither through threats nor through promises. It seems as if the classic bourgeois fear of decline and exclusion is completely alien to him. This relentless critique of political systems from the perspective of the disadvantaged and exploited is the second defining element of his practice.

Žilnik owes his intellectual freedom to a third central quality he possesses: a special artistic pragmatism. He never predefines his filmic methodology but responds flexibly to each challenge that confronts him. When it became impossible for him to produce films for cinema in Yugoslavia or West Germany, after falling out of favor with the decision makers in each country, he turned to television. When he was unable to hire actress Hanna Schygulla to perform in his film *Paradise. An Imperialist Tragicomedy* (1976), he decided it would instead star his costume designer, Gisela Siebauer. When he had only a three-figure budget, as was the case for his satirical masterpiece *Tito among the Serbs for the Second Time* (1994), he made a forty-five-minute film for a sum that would not even have sufficed as petty cash in a commercial film production. Such a filmmaker can-

not be blackmailed with the threat common to every system—that is, that his means of production will simply be confiscated. He just continues working.

A further defining aspect of Žilnik's approach to filmmaking is that he did not train at a film school where students learn to work with professional budgets; rather, he came up through the amateur film scene, where one had to learn how to make the most of minimal means. The particular economy of his productions is perhaps why he was also immune to the siren call of the mainstream film industry, which promised talented filmmakers wealth, fame, and an exciting existence if only they subjected themselves to its rules and regulations. The course of Žilnik's career has been accordingly unusual—from winning the Berlinale's Golden Bear award, to his appearance at the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen as a groundbreaking underground star, to becoming a television director and his present-day work as an independent documentary filmmaker.

Transferring this unique film oeuvre to the "white cube" of the exhibition space was no easy task. With the Zagreb-based collective What, How & for Whom/WHW as guest curators, we were able to gain the extraordinary expertise of four curators in the field of Yugoslavian art and film who are able to contextualize and rethink Žilnik's work in the contemporary art sphere. For the exhibition at the Edith-Russ-Haus, WHW developed an experimental, almost analytical, format. While only some of the filmmaker's central works were shown in full, as projections or on monitors, most of his films were exhibited in excerpts organized around diverse themes from his oeuvre. These excerpts appeared on discarded office computer monitors attached to used construction-site fences. The monitor cables came up against the fences' coarse concrete bases, which were still dirty with paint and plaster. This seemingly improvised format was nevertheless meticulously conceived, and it required a particular generosity on the part of the artist—an artist who does not view his work as a personal achievement and as his personal property, but rather as a mutual utopian effort put forth by all the participants in their making, on behalf of another possible world. ★

TRANSLATED FROM GERMAN BY MICHAEL WOLFSON

The Unemployed (film still), 1968

I want to tell you this: mostly my films were screened at the time they were made. They had good success even abroad. In the meantime, I made a bunch of TV films. But since here [in Yugoslavia] there are no things that are of normal size, we give everything the flavor of scandal, banning, enmity. We're working hard against ourselves. As if we need dissidents. Instead of being proud for being the only socialist country without dissidents, there are forces that permanently push for something to be banned. Of course, there was a political campaign in this country against critical film. [...] But you can see such comical situations occurring every ten years. All the films from the period of Black Wave had mostly very good success in international festivals. [...] Even the critics who wrote positively about these [new] films are 90 percent the same as the ones who wrote positively about those [earlier] films. And with very similar argumentation. It is a very simple formula by which films from one country become internationally interesting. They become interesting when they speak of the important issues of that country, but also when the issues presented in the film overlap with the stereotypical images of that country that are out in the world. Being a country interesting for social crises and a confusion that we emanate, the films by Boro Drašković or young [Emir] Kusturica articulated well in an authentic way some of those images about the current moment in Yugoslavia.

—Želimir Žilink, interview, "The Director Bored with Black Wave: We Don't Need Dissidents," *Polet,* January 17, 1986.

Žilnik has always been an engaged essayist but never a pamphletist. He has never marked his own position as heroic in any sense. He has never positioned himself above the failure of the society and dominant ideologies to either improve the subject or to discipline the subject. His films, therefore, do not provide some righteous point of view but explore his own beliefs and assumptions in the most critical way.

—Branislav Dimitrijević, "Behind Scepticism Lies the Fire of a Revolutionary!," in *For an Idea – Against the Status Quo: Analysis and Systematization of Želimir Žilnik's Artistic Practice* (Novi Sad: New Media Center_kuda.org, Playground produkcija, 2009), 148.

The implementation of self-management in culture enabled the organizational models of co-production, in which the crew would organize themselves into a film work collective, and invest their "creative labour" while the production house would invest the technical equipment. Our contracts would state something like: "Želimir Žilnik is entering this production by investing 60% of his director's fee that will only be paid if the movie brings in profit…" This way, the "actual" money invested in the film by the production house would be smaller and the risk would fall on the crew, who were working for free. Contracts would also stipulate how the profits, if there were any, would be shared, and also when the film would become profitable.

Avala Film had a policy to produce two feature films of debuting directors each year. In 1968, as I was the author who had won the Grand Prix Oberhausen for my documentary *The Unemployed,* and a silver medal of Belgrade for my short film *Little Pioneers,* it was my turn. As my idea for a film, *Early Works,* seemed too unfeasible, I was asked to take the risky road and I managed to make Neoplanta the co-producer, knowing that this would give me more freedom as an author.

—Želimir Žilnik, in conversation with Dubravka Sekulić, Gal Kirn, and Žiga Testen, in *Surfing the Black: Yugoslav Black Wave Cinema and Its Transgressive Moments,* ed. Gal Kirn, Dubravka Sekulić, and Žiga Testen (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Academie, 2012), 63.

Paradise. An Imperialist Tragicomedy (on-set photo), 1975.
PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

WHAT, HOW & FOR WHOM / WHW

Želimir Žilnik — Shadow Citizens

The book *Shadow Citizens* expands upon the exhibition of the same name held at the Edith-Russ-Haus for Media Art in 2018, which for the first time offered insight into the radical film praxis and extensive oeuvre of filmmaker Želimir Žilnik (b. 1942, based in Novi Sad, Serbia) within the exhibition context. From his beginnings in the lively amateur film scene of Yugoslavia in the 1960s, Žilnik has gone on to make more than fifty films, including a number of feature films and TV productions, often in the genre of docudrama. He received international recognition early on, winning the Golden Bear for Best Film at the 1969 Berlin International Film Festival for *Early Works* (1969). In the 1970s, his films encountered political opposition, and he left Yugoslavia for Germany, where he realized several independent films including some of the earliest films dealing with the topic of *Gastarbeiter*, or guest workers. In the 1980s, after leaving Germany—due to his films once again facing political opposition and censorship—and returning to Yugoslavia, Žilnik made numerous TV and feature films through which he portrays early symptoms of the country's growing social conflicts, continuing in the 1990s with films dealing with the maladies of the postsocialist transition as well as questions of migration.

Many of Žilnik's films have prophetically announced real-world events that mirror topics tackled in his work, such as the dissolution of Yugoslavia, its economic transition from socialism to a neoliberal order, the annihilation of workers' rights, and wider social erosion related to labor and migration. The title *Shadow Citizens* reflects Žilnik's lifelong focus on invisible, suppressed, and under- and misrepresented members of society and relates to themes that run through the director's filmography, such as questions of shadow economies, borders, migration, labor, terrorism, revolutionary fatigue, clashes of parallel modernisms, and more. As a concept, "shadow citizens" is related to a form of political engagement toward "amateur politics"—the imaginative and subversive nonnormative knowledge and alternative sensibilities that always lie dormant in a society and occasionally visibly push back against "politics as usual." According to urban theorist Andy Merrifield, amateur and professional politics are in fact political divisions that can be reclaimed and moved like tectonic plates.[01] Courageous amateurism is prominent in Žilnik's films, both as a concept and as a method. The notion of shadow citizens, conceived as different minorities that are increasingly becoming majorities everywhere, runs through Žilnik's oeuvre, where it is taken up as a possibility to imagine a new concept of citizenship that pushes current limits and borders. Different facets of the potentials of shadow citizens and the pressures of the amateur undercurrent in emancipatory politics and artistic production tackled in Žilnik's films also shed light on contemporary social and political urgencies.

Essays commissioned for this book situate Žilnik's body of work in broad social, cultural, and artistic contexts while focusing on more specific, often neglected, points of his practice related to gender,

01
Andy Merrifield, *The Amateur: The Pleasures of Doing What You Love* (London: Verso, 2017).

Early Works (on-set photos), 1968. PHOTOS BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ. LEFT: Želimir Žilnik and Branko Vučićević (cowriter). RIGHT: Želimir Žilnik, Karpo Godina, and the crew.

racial, pop cultural, and political issues, shedding light both on particularities of Socialist Yugoslavia and on its relevance in the wretched present moment of a world whose future is threatened by the relentless reproduction of capital.

Bert Rebhandl introduces Žilnik's oeuvre in relation to international currents of experimental and documentary filmmaking and explicates the political tenets of the ethics Žilnik practices in his documentary approach. Ana Janevski focuses on the abundant performative practices in his films, their structural meanings, and their relations to forms of popular culture. Dijana Jelača discusses the politics of gender and sexuality in relation to Žilnik's attitude toward the intersecting political domains of class, identity, and gender in the specific cultural and political times and places in which his films were made. Greg de Cuir Jr looks into the legacy of the Non-Aligned Movement and how it pertains to Žilnik's approach to his protagonists, including both its blind spots and its emancipatory promises. Boris Buden's essay, originally published in *Afterall* magazine in 2010, analyzes Žilnik's film praxis in relation to the so-called Black Wave films and considers the ideological background of the cultural debates around them in the late 1960s from today's perspective.

The exhibition and the book *Shadow Citizens* rely on the research and writing of numerous colleagues. Particularly precious are the continuous research and publishing efforts of the Novi Sad–based organization kuda.org. Through their project *For an Idea – Against the Status Quo: An Analysis and Systematization of Želimir Žilnik's Artistic Practice*, they laid immense groundwork and created an essential resource for anyone interested in Žilnik's practice.[02] The project both provides access to archival information and original materials and gathers together the insightful voices of many researchers in the first extensive monograph on Žilnik's work, published in 2009.

02
Želimir Žilnik's website (https://www.zilnikzelimir.net) was initially launched in 2009 on the occasion of the project *For an Idea – Against the Status Quo*. The site was extensively updated for the exhibition *Shadow Citizens* at the Edith-Russ-Haus for Media Art, Oldenburg, April 19–June 17, 2018.

kuda.org's work on Žilnik continued through the book *An Introduction to the Past*, realized by Boris Buden and published by kuda.org in 2013, which stands as a crucial political and theoretical contribution to the understanding of Žilnik's work within the Yugoslav context.

The research organized by Gal Kirn and Dubravka Sekulić and presented in the book *Surfing the Black: Yugoslav Black Wave Cinema and Its Transgressive Moments*, which was published by the Jan van Eyck Academie in 2012, was also a source we constantly went back to. Additionally, the magazine *Afterall* issued an important special section on Žilnik in 2010, and we are thankful for the permission to reprint Buden's text from it. We also want to acknowledge the years of research and writing on Žilnik by Buden, Branko Dimitrijević, Pavle Levi, and Jurij Meden, whose texts are crucial to our understanding of Žilnik's work. We have tried to make all these important voices present through extended quotes placed throughout the book. This volume also includes a number of quotes by Žilnik himself, taken from numerous interviews given over more than five decades.

Much of the abovementioned research on Žilnik was carried out under circumstances of official institutional ignorance toward such critical and experimental practices. This is something that many similar initiatives operating in the territory of former Yugoslavia have experienced. After the breakup of Yugoslavia, most cultural institutions displayed either amnesia or open animosity toward the progressive voices that had arisen during the socialist era, which were clearly critical of the new nationalist regimes that ruled during the harsh and corrupted decades of new nation-state building. Many initiatives have and continue to support each other in their efforts, sharing both the claim that post-Yugoslav generations have a right to be interested in this period and in experimental practices, as well as the political perspective from which we look back at the preceding era. This is why it is worth mentioning that part of the research on this history was done within the collaborative project *Political Practices of (Post-)Yugoslav Art*, organized by Prelom kolektiv (Belgrade), kuda.org (Novi Sad), SCCA/pro.ba (Sarajevo), and WHW (Zagreb), which from 2006 to 2010 looked into numerous cases of joint and neglected history. Of course, over time a lot of this type of work gets picked up by institutional structures, but the groundwork laid by independent initiatives is rarely acknowledged and often ends up framed without sufficient political and critical clarity.

Both the exhibition and book *Shadow Citizens* would not have been possible without the constant and generous support of Sarita Matijević, Žilnik's partner and producer, who not only patiently provided us with access to Žilnik's films and all the documentary material around them, but also shared her deep knowledge about these secondary sources and their authors, which goes far beyond facts and data.

Our deepest gratitude goes to Želimir Žilnik, whose passion for storytelling and political clarity never fails to inspire us. ★

Already in the 1960s, the official politics exhibited, in my opinion, baseless fear in relation to the critical, socialist, youth mood, which was articulated in youth press of limited circulation, in artistic experiments—from film to poetry, in the fields of sociology and philosophy. For me, that fear was baseless and it led to devastating results: to the reactionary trend, not artistic but political, that was first hinted at by suggestions that everyone should stick their noses only in the history of their own regions and nation. And it was later widened by "absolute regional sovereignty" in the economic and cadre policies, and by "limited Yugoslav sovereignty" in all these fields.

Leaders began to speak on behalf of Serbian, Croatian, and other working classes, so everything followed that logic: in order for local interest to be more strongly stressed, it had to be supported by "local whining," and then the bickering about who steals from whom began. And it's understandable that everything has to end in what is at the core of all tribes: both Dušan [Mihajlović] and Trpimir [Macan] stole, the Turks gouged beautiful eyes out, they all smashed arms and legs. The people were lying in heavy chains being suffocated by moldy stones. Serpent tongues bit and scorpions stung.

And our socialist state, instead of spreading literacy, creating new jobs, prescribing health and sexual education, our sad socialist state roars and wails over that "historical tragedy" of our peoples and nationalities, forgetting that all those peoples and nationalities had exactly that destiny: to be oppressed and frittered away by the powerful, and that socialism was invented for precisely that reason—to give people freedom and workers jobs and power.

—Želimir Žilnik, "Stories from the Lives of the People," *Nedjeljna Dalmacija*, May 17, 1987.

As Žilnik recently summed up, the biggest difference between the official ideology under socialism and what happens to be a "post-ideological" discourse of the "transitional" politics in states such as Serbia is that whilst today it is impossible to intellectually, artistically and politically challenge a dominant stance in an open discussion with politicians in power, in the SFRY [Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia] in the 1960s, for example, it was common to have substantial arguments with main ideologists or decision-makers in cultural policy.

—Branislav Dimitrijević, "Concrete Analysis of Concrete Situations: Marxist Education According to Želimir Žilnik," *Afterall*, Autumn/Winter 2010, 52.

IN THE PRESS: An interview with Želimir Žilnik in the magazine *Reporter*, September 5, 1986

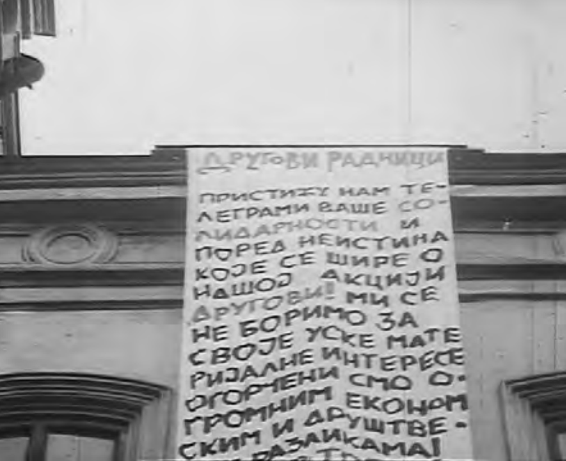
Intervju:
ŽELIMIR ŽILNIK

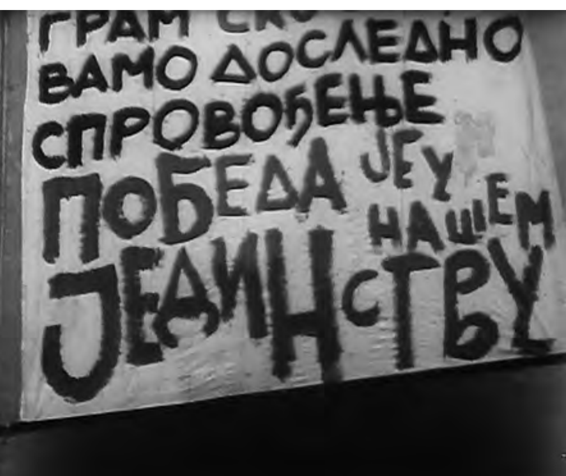
DA LI JE DOMAĆI FILM OGLUPAVIO?

Ja tvrdim da je bilo godina, ne kada je domaći film bio bolji nego što je danas, nego kada je govorio o važnijim stvarima i kada je u poređenju sa ostalim domenima kulture bio zanimljiviji i pametniji

Žilnik, on the contrary, approaches social problems in a simple, concrete and humane manner, which is after all the only working recipe for solving anything; conditioned, of course, by the spirit of solidarity and no other interest serving as motivation. This ability to familiarise and become one with the most marginal and diverse of environments has been Žilnik's trump card since the very beginning of his career as a filmmaker. Consequently his films fulfil Chris Marker's legendary utopia that true films about the workers will have to be made by the workers themselves, just as films about penguins will become conclusive only when penguins learn how to use a camera. Žilnik is not afraid to travel to the South Pole in a T-shirt and join the penguins; on top of that, his films not only convey this ability, but share with us the inspiring experience and knowledge gained from taking on these challenges.

—Jurij Meden, "Želimir Žilnik's Kenedi Trilogy," in *For an Idea – Against the Status Quo: Analysis and Systematization of Želimir Žilnik's Artistic Practice* (Novi Sad: New Media Center_kuda.org, Playground produkcija, 2009), 185.





June Turmoil (film stills), 1969.
RIGHT: Stevo Žigon.

LEFT TO RIGHT Želimir Žilnik, Dušan Ninkov, Branko Vučićević, and Karpo Godina (kneeling) on the set of *Early Works*, 1968. PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

ŽELIMIR ŽILNIK & WHW
In Conversation

APRIL 2018

WHW: Since we are trying to touch upon the entirety of your work and engagement through the exhibition *Shadow Citizens*, let's start from the beginning. How did you become interested in movies?

ŽŽ: At the time when my generation was growing up in the mid-1950s, watching films was an obsession, like gadgets for today's digital generation. At that time, the cinema was the only window open into the world. There were ten times more cinemas than there are today, and the repertoire was very rich. In one cinema they showed cowboy sagas by Howard Hawks, John Ford, Fred Zinnemann; in another cinema they showed dramas, Italian beauties, palaces, and the Mediterranean—Vittorio De Sica, Federico Fellini, Luchino Visconti, Michelangelo Antonioni. By the end of the '50s, more realistic films emerged with which we identifed: François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Louis Malle, and others.

When I finished high school, I was invited to be the editor of programs at a youth cultural center in Novi Sad called the Youth Tribune. This place was as interesting as the cinema. It hosted experimental independent theater groups. We were exhibiting the latest visual trends. The film department exposed us to experimental films. I met filmmakers who were ten years older than me—Dušan Makavejev, Živojin Pavlović, Marko Babac, Mihovil Pansini, Vladimir Petek, Ivan Martinac, and so on. They had not been involved with professional film studios yet. Films were shot on 16 mm and 8 mm in cinema clubs. Participants in philosophical and sociological debates were people who would in a couple of years establish the Korčula Summer School and *Praxis* magazine: Rudi Supek, Gajo Petrović, Taras Kermauner, Veljko Rus, Danko Grlić, Zagorka Golubović, Nebojša Popov, Milan Kangrga, and others. Simultaneously with my work at the Youth Tribune, I went to law school. There was no faculty of fine arts in Novi Sad, and these studies and completion of the law program helped me to cope and defend myself when I had problems with censorship and with court procedures in the years to come.

WHW: What beyond the Youth Tribune and the cinema clubs influenced you?

ŽŽ: From my earliest days, I used to spend a lot of time at the theater. My uncle Milenko Šuvaković was a theater director and the art director of the most important Yugoslav theater festival, Sterijino pozorje. I visited the rehearsals, went to workshops where costumes and sets were made, and I also met many actors. Then, at the production house Avala Film in Belgrade, I became an assistant director upon Dušan Makavejev's invitation. Apart from local films, Avala Film also worked on big coproductions. For example, in collaboration with Artur Brauner's German production house, CCC Film, costumes, props, and huge set designs were made at Avala Film for *Die Nibelungen*, in the mid-1960s, which was the most expensive postwar German film at the time.

I learned there what a complex job a feature film is; that the preparation is essential as well as the coordination of the team and the willingness of the director to make decisions, yet to be open to listening to his associates. I witnessed very awkward situations, conflicts, bullying, nervous breakdowns, and the loss of a lot of time and money—when unprepared bosses shouted at the crew and made demands, and did not know what they were saying. I learned then to focus my energy and time into preparation, into the choice of actor-interpreters and crew.

WHW: One notices a certain fascination with manual work in your oeuvre. You have shot horseshoeing, dough kneading, working in mines, and the like for a long time and with much love.

ŽŽ: We live in a time of virtual jobs, but fifty years ago we all defined ourselves according to what we were doing. Craftsmen not only served people but also were the most respected people in a village. When you needed to find out some information, you would be sent to to a barber's shop; people gathered there, so he knew most. Craftsmen built cities, or rebuilt them after invaders had passed through. Novi Sad, where I live, was appointed the status of a city in 1749 by Empress Maria Theresa of the Habsburg monarchy. Before that, on the southern bank of the Danube, the huge Petrovaradin Fortress had been built, on the border with the Ottoman Empire. Novi Sad was then given its official Latin name, Neoplanta (New Garden); it was built as a center for craftsmen, vegetable growers, and administrators who served the needs of the fortress staff. Every couple of years, the soldiers were replaced or killed. The streets of Novi Sad had names like Shoemakers' Street, Saddlers' Street, Carpenters' Street. If peace lasted, they would build schools, marketplaces and fairs, brothels and theaters.

Half a century ago, working on film also required various knowledge of machines, electricity, optics, and chemicals. When I started working in the professional 35 mm format, the camera required a cameraman with seven or eight assistants. One would put negative into the camera, take it out, pack it, and send it to the laboratory. Another one was needed for sharpening—taking care of the sharpness of the shot. A third one for "panning"—camera movements left and right, up and down. Four men were needed to set the rails for the camera, because it weighed 250 to 300 kilograms (this is the Arri Blimp 300). The cameraman, who was the head of that division, was called the director of photography. He mingled around the actors and sets with a light meter, measuring how the reflectors illuminated the faces. He made corrections. Shouted to his assistants telling them which lens to fit on the camera. He did not touch the camera. There were five or six electricians working on lighting, and they followed the directions of the director of photography.

WHW: Let us continue with the topic of work. Already in 1968, you made *The Unemployed*. Why were you interested in the topic of the unemployed so early in your career, and was it connected later with the many stories you told about guest workers, refugees, and so on?

The Unemployed
(film stills), 1968

ŽŽ: From the mid-1960s onward, it seemed to us that the cultural policy was rather relaxed, that dogmatic party apparatchiks were less influential. Filmmakers, visual artists, and other such types of makers were not employed; theirs was an independent status, and they were paid under authorship contracts. This provided a chance for film projects to be done as joint investments of a team of authors and a film studio that possessed incredibly expensive technology—laboratory, cameras, sound, and lighting. Financial parameters of the investment would be calculated, and the authors and the team would be "coproducers" and co-owners of the film. So both the risk and responsibility were shared. Some of the most important Yugoslav films were made following this model of coproduction, which was called a "film working community."

The "liberal moment" of Yugoslav socialism was epitomized in the proclamation of the new program of the League of Communists from those years: "Nothing that has been created should be so sacred to us that it cannot be transcended and superseded by something still freer, more progressive, and more human." At the same time, factories were being modernized, and companies started doing business with the newly liberated countries of Asia and Africa, but also with the West, which called into question the "state-orchestrated general employment and prices." Adaptation to market conditions was demanded. Trained professionals were employed. The egalitarian principle that the "working class is in line with progress" ceased to exist. In those years, agreements were signed with Germany and Austria under which they took in tens of thousands of Yugoslav workers in an organized manner based on needs for the reconstruction of infrastructure and to work in factories in the West.

I often passed by the Novi Sad Employment Center, and for days I watched the assembled unhappy workers, who said they were made redundant in their companies and now were waiting for the Germans to hire them. And indeed, the representatives of the trade unions from Germany and the medical commission arrived, too. They talked with people, assigned them to work posts. They organized their transport, accommodation, worker status, and employment. It was not just a situation of novelty and hope, but for many it meant stressful changes in rhetoric and memory, because there were a fair number of them who remembered the Second World War. There was little news and explanation in the media about this "new phase of our development." Like most projects, we did *The Unemployed* to hear the whole story from the people who were confronted with an unknown and dramatic situation.

WHW: Later on you dealt often with the topic of guest workers, including in the television productions of the 1980s. Do you

Pretty Women Walking through the City (poster), 1986. DESIGNED BY BRANISLAV KERAC.

Snežana Nikšić in *Good Morning Belgrade* (film stills), 1985

Good Morning Belgrade

Yugoslavia • 1985 • 70 min. • 16 mm • Betacam

At the center of this docudrama are the events and tensions that occur during the shooting of a feature film about the Belgrade of a speculative future. The director of the film sets up unrealistic expectations of the producer. The producer engages workers of the city utility services as extras and to help her with set design. These people work for waterworks, sewer systems, and sanitation units. In this drama, we are immersed in their lives and the problems they face while trying to keep Belgrade a functioning city. By overstepping the budget of the film, the producer breaks the law, and during a court trial where the crew members are in the witness stand, we follow the drama of how a film is made.

Although this is not mentioned explicitly in the film, the science fiction film that the director is making is in fact Žilnik's *Pretty Women Walking through the City* (1986); *Good Morning Belgrade* is its companion piece and a commentary on the working conditions in film production at the time. Both films—*Good Morning Belgrade*, made as a docudrama for television, and *Pretty Women*, made as a feature film intended for cinemas—were produced so that the budget of one supported the making of the other. This was a rather standard procedure at the time, as republic TV stations had high demand for a constant influx of new programming, and therefore had flexibility in commissioning new works and distributing the funds. At today's rates, the budget procured for a TV film would be approximately €150,000, and as such required radical thriftiness—for example, there was one cameraman working both the movie and Beta video cameras for both films. *Good Morning Belgrade* was filmed during the day and *Pretty Women* during the night. A fortunate circumstance was that the architect Bogdan Bogdanović was the mayor of Belgrade at the time, and he agreed to give access to the civic services. ●

think that you may have anticipated what the film industry is going through today, where an increasing number of respected directors are doing television or Internet series, which are often more brave than mainstream films?

žž: When I was in Munich in the 1970s asking around for producers, I noticed that filmmakers and teams were communicating through television without any fear. I went to Telepool, Tochtergesellschaft Bayerishe Rundfunk, and several other companies whose addresses and telephone numbers I had. They used to buy ten to fifteen Yugoslav films annually. As I was waiting for the director Siegfried Magold to see me, I heard that there were directors and producers of German and French films coming to see him to discuss coproductions. The director received me warmly, said he appreciated my short films and *Early Works* (1969), and asked me what I had that was new. I explained that I would like to work on a couple of documentaries with guest workers as protagonists. He referred me to Filmverlag der Autoren, which was a kind of film working community where Alexander Kluge, Werner Herzog, Edgar Reitz, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder worked on their films at that time. I had already met these filmmakers at festivals. I learned that if I were to do a feature film, I could send the project to Telepool and they would decide whether they would come on as coproducer, and also that once I finished my short film, I should offer it to them, so it could be bought for television. At that time in Yugoslavia, film production was oriented toward cinema distributors, both in the country and abroad, and new films (part of the so-called Black Wave), which I myself worked on, were very rarely shown on television.

Several years after my return home, I had in mind the Western European practice of creating for television, so I contacted Television Novi Sad. The main reason I did this, however, was the fact that I saw that all the other production doors were closed to me. Television had two extraordinary advantages: technology—from the laboratory to the studios, cameras, and lighting—everything was in-house. And most of the technicians were permanently employed and available. Another advantage was that when a film or a show was made, the audience was secured. In the late 1970s, when I started offering and realizing projects for the Novi Sad and Belgrade television houses, feature films that we had shot for drama departments were shown at eight in the evening and were seen on the Yugoslav Radio-Television network by four to five million people. It was then that I faced a very difficult problem: How was I to keep dealing with destinies and topics that interested me and still be watched not only by people who appreciated such an approach but also by families with three or four generations living in one household? The answer was found in a hybrid genre: docudrama.

And we managed to do several titles that were really innovative, critical, and outside the mainstream, which we would not have been able to do in the film industry—*Brooklyn–Gusinje* (1988), *Hot*

Pretty Women Walking through the City

Yugoslavia • 1986 • 100 min. • 35 mm • color

Belgrade in 2041 is an abandoned and devastated city covered in garbage. A couple of old men live there: a former journalist with his daughter, an ex-politician with his wife, and a former policeman who guards a boarding house where eight girls live. The old men bring up the girls in the spirit of the traditions of the former Yugoslav nations, which is a risky business because Southern Europe is being ravaged by a group that forbids any sort of remembering of the past.

While the "good guys" in the movie are played by established Yugoslav actors, or in many cases by nonprofessional actors, the "bad guys," referred to as the inspectors of Southern Europe, are played by artist Tomislav Gotovac, theater director Ljubiša Ristić, and movie director Goran Marković. Yugoslav partisan fighter, politician, human rights activist, and historian Vladimir Dedijer, expelled from the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in 1954, also appears in the film, playing a 127-year-old version of himself.

The story starts at the moment when the former journalist and the other remaining survivors start an action to revive Belgrade in order to mark the hundredth anniversary of July 4, 1941, the people's uprising against Yugoslavia's German occupiers in the Second World War. The main character recounts the events of his youth, in the 1990s, when hatred and destruction prevailed and brought about the war and dissolution of the country. Upon the movie's premiere at the 1986 Pula Film Festival, the media reported that it was clear from the film that Žilnik had lost connection to both reason and reality. Alas, the future in fact proved Žilnik right. ●

Natalija Lučanin on the set of *Pretty Women Walking through the City*, 1985

Paychecks (1987), *Pretty Women Walking through the City* (1986), *Oldtimer* (1989), and others.

WHW: We are curious about your attitude toward female characters. For example, in *Vera and Eržika* (1981), we have two women fighting for their rights. You portray them with great tenderness and affection. Your films also have scenes like the one with the patriarchal father of a Roma family who wants to marry off his daughter against her will, and she escapes and tries to cope. There are also stories about female friendships in your films. But in *Early Works*, you kill the main character, Jugoslava.

ŽŽ: There are fewer female characters in my films than I wanted. I wanted to have more of them because they fight in their lives on several fronts: they must eliminate the combination of male inferiority and aggressiveness; a husband's frustration and neglect of children; being thrown out of the house; their sons becoming criminals; and alcoholism and domestic violence. In addition to all this, they have to feign seduction, and according to the current Balkan fashion, they also must be harem divas. Mission impossible.

For example, for *Logbook_Serbistan* (2015), we were looking for female characters because they had been through the trauma of war, famine, and threats of rape. But the male refugees would not let the women be in front of the camera. One agreed, provided the woman always held her child in her arms.

As far as *Early Works* is concerned, the protagonists were portrayed using a specific language, where visual and rhetorical symbols were used, with lots of proclamations and citations. The characters were outlined as a sketch and in a schematic manner. Only the main heroine had enough space to reflect the conundrums of what it means to be a "girl in socialism," and the hypocrisy of the proclaimed freedom of speech and socialist slogans. She has to wade through the mud of male unfulfilled ambition and power. *Early Works* was shot in the autumn of 1968, after the tank intervention in Prague, against Alexander Dubček's "socialism with a human face." That film was a question mark. Could the current state of socialism be repaired, or would it disappear in the flames that took Yugoslavia away?

WHW: It seems to us that your political position has had incredible consistency throughout all your films.

ŽŽ: I cannot say anything about that. In my political position or attitude, I endeavor to maintain a kind of independence that matters to me. Without compromise, I will not put up with anything that I find to to be dull, rotten, and suspicious. Here I am ready for what is called a "sacrifice" in bourgeois life; that is, I am willing to give up or lose my position, or to be removed by someone somewhere, which does not seem such a bad consequence to me. It depends on one's

Pretty Women Walking through the City (film stills), 1986

BOTTOM RIGHT
Theater director Ljubiša Ristić

character, and everyone's is different. Some fantastically intelligent and fine people have a need to follow authority. I've had several such friends. They are not bad people; they just feel safer when they are under someone's authority. And I feel as if I were chained under that authority. It is completely individual, and there is no answer to this. I would even find stating some political credo to be absurd. Look at the films—maybe I have somehow taken a position that some people like, and in many situations I took a stance that many people did not like. I've spent most of my life as a man regarded as an eccentric who is always doing some kind of loser stuff. Even those television dramas and films that you consider today to be good were sincerely despised by many of my colleagues.

WHW: You wrote a manifesto that accompanied *Black Film* (1971), and at the 1971 International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, you even showed the movie with the manifesto written over it. How does the manifesto sound to you today?

ŽŽ: It sounds pretty OK to me. If I used the same methodology to analyze the present situation, I would find today's situation to be drastically more inhumane in terms of social difference and basic human rights than it was back then. In ex-Yugoslav countries, there are millions of unemployed people, without any prospects for themselves or for their children. Pension funds have been looted. Factories have been seized in which workers invested their incomes to expand the production and technological innovation, as we did in the film working communities. The new "democratic national-capitalist" authorities do not acknowledge all this. Today's corruption is several dozen times more brutal. Affiliation to the ruling party is more important for promotion in life than it used to be in socialism. The space for culture in the media has been reduced, as has advocacy for workers' rights.

Client-friendly sponsorship of cultural institutions, including support for films, eliminates works that criticize, which is worse than before. The facts show that in the last twenty-five years of "freedom and democracy," there have been no better and more critical films than *When I Am Dead and Gone* (1967) and *The Ambush* (1969) by Živojin Pavlović; *Love Affair, or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator* (1967) and *W.R.: Mysteries of the Organism* (1971) by Dušan Makavejev; *The Feast* (1967) and *The Trek* (1968) by Đorđe Kadijević; *Handcuffs* (1969) by Krsto Papić; *Sunday* (1969) by Lordan Zafranović; *The Living Truth* (1972) by Tomislav Radić, and so on.

WHW: Can you tell us something about the figure or position of the dissident? From today's sadly widespread anti-socialist and anti-communist perspective, it is as if this label has been attached to many positions that have not actually had dissident content. Were you seen as a dissident, too?

Eržebet Jakab and Vera Miladinović on the set of *Vera and Eržika*, 1981. PHOTO BY VLADIMIR ČERVENKA.

BOTTOM
Vera and Eržika (film stills), 1981

žž: Of those who say they had a critical attitude in the time of socialism, two-thirds are complete liars. Some of them were even placed high up in the bodies of cultural repression, as part of various commissions. My colleagues and I did not call ourselves dissidents. "Dissident" is a term from so-called prison camp socialism, where these artists were forced out of the country, such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, for example. Or they were imprisoned. We had our passports with us in the early 1970s when several of us, all film directors, went abroad. I had the impression that the neo-dogmatic group had nothing against us leaving. On the contrary, it was as if they were expecting us to perform some sort of "enemy activity," so they could arrest us. When we returned, Dušan Makavejev, Aleksandar Petrović, and some writers and painters and I—we were not given the status of dissidents, but were considered "unsuitable," because of our "conceptual errors."

When I arrived in Germany as a guest worker, I could not say that I was a banned artist in Yugoslavia, because no one would have believed it. In those years, Yugoslavia produced films that received awards at the biggest festivals and that appeared on television in many countries. I was asked by the director Alexander Kluge, an important representative of the German independent film movement, to provide him with Yugoslavia's policy on stimulating film production. He had heard that this policy had been greatly successful. We translated it in a week, and significant parts influenced the development of Germany's new policy on film.

WHW: What do you think of our exhibition title, *Shadow Citizens*, as a suggestion for a through line that connects your work?

žž: The lives and fates of people who live off their work are constantly threaded through my movies. People in this category live in precarious conditions, without security and privileges, and they can rely only on themselves and the people closest to them. What is most important when you make a film based on those stories is that you work with people with nothing to lose. They are the people who should be given a medium through which they can express themselves in some way, by communicating their own attitudes or their feeling of being forgotten. When working with them, you are working with the oppressed and poor people who are least afraid of endangering their status in any way. They have this position of freedom.

I will give you an example from when I worked in Austria on a new film a year ago. The producer raised the funds to make a film about migrants who had received documents and were preparing for a longer stay in Austria and about how they were "becoming EU citizens." With my associate Jasmina Janković, who is a court interpreter, we visited asylum centers to find people who wanted to participate in the film. The loudest ones approached us first, with their agendas: some wanted to form separate ethnic clubs, and they wanted us to promote them. Others changed their political favorites

Kenedi Hasani on the set of *Kenedi Is Getting Married*, 2007. PHOTO BY MIODRAG MILOŠEVIĆ.

Dragoljub Ljubičić in *Tito among the Serbs for the Second Time* (film still), 1994

every couple of days—in late 2016, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was declared a defeated party. But those who declared themselves as his opponents began to praise Iran and Russia in early 2017, while Assad was their "legitimate president." When they heard I was from Serbia, they suggested we speak in the Russian language. I realized that we were wasting our time in the labyrinths of geopolitics between Donald Trump, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Vladimir Putin.

But then we started talking to those who were going through the real administrative labyrinths so they could learn German, present their trades or professions, and get residence permits. Men and women told us stories that were new, stories that described the relations and tensions that had not been present either in the war at home or on the road, such as misunderstandings in the family between authoritarian fathers and children or between relatives who found it difficult to grasp language lessons. The older men felt uncomfortable being taught and evaluated by women. On the other hand, there were young people who found friends and integrated faster; they wanted to live alone, away from their families, in "freedom," as they said. Then girls and women told us about situations they had not expected. For example, that the parents of a young refugee would not allow their son to marry a woman whom he had met as a refugee seeking asylum, because she was "unclean"—she had been through hell and back—and they coerced him to marry a bride he did not know, who was "a virgin," and whom they would bring in illegally.

Based on these stories and with the help of those who wanted to take part in the film, we drew up a concept and a shooting schedule. We edited the film a couple of months ago. I told the team and the producer that the first viewers should be the people in the film and those of us who gathered them, because if any of us have any objections to the final edit, we have to correct them. If we accept the film that we have been working on, experience tells me that others will accept it too, and maybe it will travel around the world.

WHW: Would you agree with us if we said that you constantly choose to stay "in the shadow"?

žž: It's not simply a matter of choice—it is the real position I am in. I come from a country that has a small marginal market and where a marginal language is spoken. For example, regardless of my rather comprehensive film oeuvre, I cannot answer the simplest question that is being asked in America. They say there: "Do not bother us with all these many titles. Make a list only of films that earned $15 million and more." My answer is: "I do not have such a film." This is my real position. I do not want to say that it does not suit me. It does, because it allows me to do what really interests me. ★

Žilnik's production in Germany was not characterised by the exploitation of his socialist experience (as it happened with many dissident writers and artists who left their countries of origin) but by shifting his interest to analysing relations between the ideological discourse and social practice in liberal capitalism.

—Branislav Dimitrijević, "Behind Scepticism Lies the Fire of a Revolutionary!," in *For an Idea – Against the Status Quo: Analysis and Systematization of Želimir Žilnik's Artistic Practice* (Novi Sad: New Media Center_kuda.org, Playground produkcija, 2009), 145–46.

Paradise. An Imperialist Tragicomedy speaks about the fact that part of the anti-terrorist pursuit in Germany is simply provoked by the establishment in order to keep tension in society, which is more compactly organized when the enemy is front and center. The story is based on a true event that happened to a right-wing MP from Berlin, who was kidnapped and held by terrorists for fifteen days. And when he finally managed to get out, or was released, he had a huge career—he was elected by a great majority of voters because he had proved that he had been able to easily deal with leftists, he wrote feuilletons in papers all over. […] So, this kidnapping worked for him in a brilliant way as a marketing tool. The film *Paradis*e tells a story of a venture capitalist company dealing with shady jobs, from illegal imports and exploitation of the workforce to financial speculation. So this venture capitalist company organizes kidnappings of its own bosses so they can appear later in the public as martyrs. I had an impression that, first, we're making the film about certain topics that are very present in the life of Germany, and second, some things, particularly guest workers [*Gastarbeiter*], and so on, which are still on the agenda, we discussed very openly at that time. I think that not only are guest workers being exploited, but they represent an incredible internal market—a whole enormous internal colony that great imperialist states have in their pockets.

Those were the theses of the film, plus this situation with the anti-terrorist agenda, which I felt was like a search for the enemy. And when the film was finished, one situation occurred that for me was a routine situation with those ideological campaigns. […] I took the film to some people I knew in German television, which regularly bought our socially critical films (laughs). And, so, in those big German television stations, it happened that I showed the film. All the doors suddenly closed one by one. And those friends of mine—editors, even the big bosses—said: "Please take this thing out of the building right away, and nobody can know it was ever here." So that any traces of the film being screened were literally being erased … There we touched—maybe by not being aware enough of the seriousness of the situation in Germany in 1975–76—we touched some of their taboos, to which they reacted, so to speak, in the same way we reacted here. Even more hysterically than the reactions to the series of "Black Films" were in our country.

—Želimir Žilnik, interview (untitled), *Reporter*, August 1986.

Amelie Ohlbrecht and Gisela Siebauer in *Paradise. An Imperialist Tragicomedy* (film still), 1976

Luka Bauer (back) and Franja Handrla (front) on the set of *Black Film*, 1971.
PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

BERT REBHANDL

The Borders of Paradise: Želimir Žilnik between Artistic Strategies and Political Systems

The last word in Želimir Žilnik's film *Marble Ass* (1995)—"men"—is uttered with exasperation and disgust. But there is still, after many bad experiences with men, a sense of longing in the voice of Merlin, a queer woman who lives as a trans sex worker on the fringes of post-Yugoslavian society in Belgrade. As in many other languages, the Serbian word for "man," *čovek*, is the same term that signifies the whole human race. And by the end of *Marble Ass*, there is reason to believe that it has even more layers: mankind or humanity certainly has issues with men (especially tough guys, men prone to demonstrations of masculinity, men fighting wars for their supposed nation). But Merlin is an example of different possibilities for men. A man can actually be a woman, sexually or emotionally or gender stereotypically, a man can be a warrior or a saint, a man can be his own other by putting out to dickheads. There is something intrinsically dialectical about the word "men" at the end of *Marble Ass*, and the film itself is equally made of contradictions, which add up to something original on its own level.

The foundational contradiction sublated by Žilnik in *Marble Ass* is of course between reality and fiction. To put it simply: the fictions of Želimir Žilnik have always been strongly permeated by the realities of his eventful life and the times he came to tell about, more so than the works of other filmmakers who react to their experiences by telling stories directly about them. Žilnik tells stories with his experiences, with his interventions and reflections. His career stretches over half a decade and several systems: the Non-Aligned Yugoslavia, a socialist federal state with a charismatic leader in Marshal Tito and an elite in every regional system from Macedonia to Slovenia, national television being one of them; the post-1968 and pre-1977 Federal Republic of Germany—that is, West Germany—a democracy besieged by leftist terrorism and the temptation to fight it with methods of *Ausnahmezustand* [state of emergency] (Germany received Žilnik as a guest worker, whereas he conceived of himself as a dissident intellectual in exile); the failing state of Yugoslavia, disintegrating violently into its previously federated parts (and smaller parts of the parts) after 1991; and eventually the European Union in its period of Eastern enlargement, with Southeast Europe (a.k.a. the Balkans) in a strategically important and vulnerable position on the outskirts of an increasingly disputed "unified space" of freedoms, which by the definitions of territoriality and "rule-based order" have to be declined or granted to people from outside the EU according to increasingly contested laws such as the Geneva Conventions.

By historical chance, Žilnik, a man born in a Gestapo-run concentration camp in occupied Serbia in 1942, when the Nazis were at the peak of their expansion, became the quintessential European filmmaker from a position just outside the European Union. His political and aesthetic strategies have always been informed by the new waves of the postwar societies of Italy (1940s and '50s; in essence: Neo-Realism, with its turn toward the common people), France (1960s; in essence: Nouvelle Vague, with its several iterations of a

cinema informed by pop and mass culture and high modernism at the same time), and Germany (1970s; in essence: Neuer Deutscher Film, with its double-bind between romanticism and experimentalism). But Žilnik's approach to filmmaking instead increasingly came to be taken over by a pragmatism that arose from encounters with the subjects of his films. People like Merlin, Franja Handrla (from his early *Black Film*, 1971), Bora Joksimović (*The Comedy and Tragedy of Bora Joksimović*, 1977), and the Kosovarian Rom Kenedi Hasani (of the *Kenedi* trilogy, 2003–07) are some of the most notable examples of typical Žilnik subjects. When looking back on this exceptional career, one sees many surprising continuities spanning the epochal disruptions that punctuate the director's work. His approach is often playful, but always based on a simple premise: he wants to see history from the viewpoint of "beneath."

We can start with Franja Handrla, a homeless man who became the subject of Žilnik's *Black Film* in the early 1970s. "I sleep badly. I eat badly. In my life there is no comfort," he states. "Nobody gives anything to me." That is, this is the case before he meets Žilnik, who decides to take six homeless people into his home, an apartment of not even fifty square meters. The filmmaker's wife sleeps on a mattress in the living room. Žilnik abruptly wakes her and sends her to sleep in the children's room. He wants to help the poor, but he also wants to make a film. The men bring an "awful stench" into the apartment, but also a challenge for society. How can a system claiming to be a workers' state neglect people like Franja so thoroughly? Žilnik speaks as a lawyer (he studied law before turning to film), as an intellectual, and as an artist.

The next morning, he takes to the streets to ask people what could and should be done about people like Franja. His seemingly spontaneous act is conceptual at the same time: in a socialist society, there are supposedly no gaps to give rise to civil action like Žilnik's, because every possible issue is already taken care of. In *Black Film*, Žilnik points to a blind spot: "bare life" (a term developed by political theory to describe life outside institutionalization and investiture) has been registered only by an artist. The apartment, tiny as it may seem, marks Žilnik as a privileged subject in Yugoslavia. With the outrageous performativity of *Black Film*, he literally puts not only his privilege, but his very existence as a professional, at risk.

The roots of his engagement are easily recognizable in the feature film *Early Works* (1969). Žilnik's generation was a generation of change. Living in a socialist society, Žilnik found the crucial experience of 1968 not in Paris but in the Prague Spring and its repression. The reform movement in Czechoslovakia also had a strong artistic faction, with filmmakers like Věra Chytilová and Evald Schorm at the aesthetic (utopian) forefront of the progressive movement. Yugoslavia went through it with its own trajectory of liberalization and eventual tightening of the ideological grip. The young people who in *Early Works* go into the countryside to build communism under

Black Film
(film stills), 1971

TOP LEFT Franja Handrla
BOTTOM LEFT Cveta Vuletić

TOP RIGHT Želimir Žilnik
BOTTOM RIGHT Cveta Vuletić and Ivana Branovački

Black Film (film stills), 1971

TOP LEFT Želimir Žilnik and Luka Bauer
BOTTOM LEFT Cveta Vuletić, Ivana Branovački, and Želimir Žilnik
BOTTOM RIGHT Milorad Živančev, Ivana Branovački, and Maša Žilnik

the conditions of backward rurality conceive of themselves as the typical heroes of Soviet propaganda movies and the political trends of Maoism. But their experience shatters their conceptions: notions of progress literally get stuck in the muddy streets. The protagonists' clothing and style would not look out of place in a pre-1968 Jean-Luc Godard movie like *La Chinoise* (1967), but in France the avant-garde never reached regions as *profonde* as the villages Žilnik went to during the making of *Early Works*.

Operating within the system of national (in Yugoslavia, federal and regional) television, Žilnik enjoyed the freedoms of a period of reform-oriented, audiovisual nation-building spanning Central and Western Europe. Broadcasters like ORF (Österreichischer Rundfunk) in Austria and RAI (Radiotelevisione italiana) in Italy at that time were institutions of criticality and didacticism, frequently with the premise of entertainment. That was exactly what Žilnik could relate to.

His short film *Uprising in Jazak* (1973) is an excellent example of his strategy of subversion by affirmation: in many ways, it looks like a propaganda film about the partisan war against fascism between 1941 and 1945. The people of the village Jazak (halfway between Novi Sad and Mitrovica, in the region of Vojvodina) recollect their contributions to the resistance against the occupation ("Schnapps for the wounded," "We took the oath in 1941"). This people's war was the founding myth of Socialist Yugoslavia, so Žilnik was completely in line with official historiography. But the enthusiasm of the people seems to go a little bit too far. The playful directing (sometimes literally collecting memories from people lined up at their doors along a street with a camera on a motor vehicle) causes the testimonials to merge into small reenactments. At the end of the film, people talk about how they welcomed the Red Army with the *Kozara* dance, and Žilnik films a Ferguson tractor "dancing" exuberantly. At a time when cultural bureaucracy was turning sour, this enthusiasm rubbed censors the wrong way. Žilnik was considered unreliable. He ran into difficulties with his next project, *Freedom or Cartoons* (1972), which was never finished, and decided to leave the country and start making films in Germany.

The major topic for this second half of Žilnik's career surfaced at the very beginning of his time in Germany: migration and the resulting multilingual, multilayered society it begets. In the short documentary *Inventory* (1975), he presents the population of a tenement building at Metzstrasse 11 in Munich. The camera was fixed in a position on the stairway, and then all the people living in the building were asked to come down the stairs, one after the other, and give a brief introduction, either in broken German or in their respective mother tongue, about their status of residence (in the country for how many years?), work or education, and social situation ("Für mich schlecht" [Bad for me], says the wife of one Genaro). Only two women speak German as their first language; one says she lives in the building for the cheap rent. The last word goes to the janitor, who has lived

in the building for forty years: “Ich bin mit allen Hauseinwohnern zufrieden” (I am content with all the inhabitants).

The film presents a segment of the German society of the early 1970s that slowly became recognized by Neuer Deutscher Film. Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* came out in 1973, and its influence is apparent in Žilnik’s work of the period. But, as usual, Žilnik gives his politics a different spin: while Fassbinder was heading toward his version of American-influenced genre cinema, Žilnik persisted with his ambition to subvert notions of genre.

In Bavaria, he connected to an alternative scene of political engagement and communal living. The folk band Sparifankal sang the tune of the times: “Des land is nimma sche zum Lebm” (This country is not offering a good life anymore). The one-hour *Paradise. An Imperialist Tragicomedy* (1976) is Žilnik’s central work from the German period. His approach at that time was militant and playful at the same time. Even today on his website he claims that the contemporary event he drew on for the film’s central narrative was “fake.” But the kidnapping of the conservative politician Peter Lorenz in Berlin in February 1975 was not staged, as Žilnik claims, but an actual act by the Bewegung 2. Juni (a movement whose name refers to the death of student Benno Ohnesorg in 1967, which sparked the protests and revolutionary ambitions of 1968 in Germany). In *Paradise*, the

Paradise. An Imperialist Tragicomedy (film stills), 1976

TOP Gisela Siebauer

BOTTOM LEFT ON THE OPPOSITE PAGE Michael Straleck (facing camera)

Paradise. An Imperialist Tragicomedy

West Germany • 1976 • 90 min. • 16 mm • color

A multinational company owned by Mrs. Judit Angst is facing financial difficulties. She decides to hire a group of young anarchists to fake her kidnapping. After a couple of weeks spent in confinement, she will be able to justify the downfall of her company before the people, and at the same time it will also build her status as an opponent of destruction and chaos. A direct inspiration for the film was the kidnapping of Peter Lorenz, a center-right politician from West Berlin, in 1975. Lorenz spent five days in the captivity of the terrorist group Bewegung 2. Juni (2 June Movement), from which he was released after the government met the kidnappers’ demands. The case was subsequently exploited for the benefit of his election bid to become the mayor of Berlin.

The film was planned as a big production with a 250,000 DM budget, and Žilnik had already extensively scouted various locations in Munich and was negotiating the participation of prominent actors such as Hanna Schygulla and Rainer Werner Fassbinder. The atmosphere in the city was tense due to concerns around terrorism and the growing prominence of the Rote Armee Fraktion (Red Army Faction). Because of the political dynamics at the time, Bavarian television withdrew its support for the film. As a result, Žilnik lost both his funding and the producer who facilitated the TV collaboration, so he decided to do the film in a more low-key manner. His production budget shrank to 60,000 DM, which came from some previously confirmed sponsors, and he moved forward with a team of people who were enthusiastic about making the movie happen—such as, for example, his costume designer, Gisela Siebauer, who agreed to play the leading female role. During the editing process, done at Filmverlag der Autoren, colleagues were already warning Žilnik that the film would get him into trouble.

Paradise premiered at Werkstattkino in Munich. Although the audience was enthusiastic, Žilnik learned that the police came the day after and asked that the film be removed from the cinema’s repertoire. To evaluate the response his film might receive upon wider release, Žilnik decided to show it to a committee of prominent film critics who worked for the broadcaster ARD in Frankfurt. After watching the film, they advised him not to show it to anyone. Upon Žilnik’s return to Munich, he was almost immediately visited by the police. They couldn’t find anything to link him to terrorism, but saw receipts that showed that some of the film’s collaborators had been paid in cash. Claiming this amounted to tax fraud, they arrested Žilnik and his cameraman, Andrej Popović, and took them to police headquarters at midnight. Žilnik called Alexander Kluge, who at the time was the president of the Directors Association, and also a lawyer to help them out. Kluge negotiated that the police would drop charges and release Žilnik and Popović from jail, on the condition they would leave the country. They had twelve hours to pack before the police escorted them to the Austrian border. They were never officially registered as expelled or banned from returning. ●

The Comedy and Tragedy of Bora Joksimović (film stills), 1977

kidnapping Žilnik recounts is indeed fake: a woman named Angst ("fear," in English) stages an abduction in order to cause her company to go bankrupt from the resulting uncertainty—and make an illegal profit from the stunt. She has to get in touch with radical elements, and accordingly the film gets more radical by the minute. *Paradise* looks very much like a collective endeavor, a film full of conflicting ideas and strategies, a happening in cinematic form, and at the same a subverted thriller in the fashion of Godard's adaptations of pulp crime material (think *Made in U.S.A.*, 1966). At the core of the analysis of Germany's political economy of the period is again the impact of worker migrations on the local capitalist system, this time in a polemical scene that hints at the selection procedures of a different period in German history.

In 1977, Žilnik was already back in Yugoslavia and working again in television. His portrait *The Comedy and Tragedy of Bora Joksimović*, about a retired theater employee, is very much a paradigm for the way he would come to work with protagonists in the future. Bora's work responsibilities did not include anything remotely artistic; he was a stoker. But secretly he always wrote scripts and scenarios for teleplays. Žilnik takes two of these stories and adapts them, but not in the orthodox manner of "realizing" the written material. Rather, he looks for the stories Joksimović came up with within the life of their author. One story is a comedy, the other a tragedy, and both are strongly informed by sexual fantasies. It might appear as if Žilnik is poking fun at Bora's amateurish plots. But the opposite is true: Bora is the first in a long series of characters that serve as typical Žilnik antiheroes, who are simultaneously his mediums and somehow stand-ins for the societies he tries to decipher through outcasts and oddballs.

A good example of Žilnik's television work of the late 1980s is *Brooklyn – Gusinje* (1988), produced by TV Beograd. It is more or less a conventional TV feature, with lead actress Ivana Žigon playing a character with her own first name. Ivana gets "discovered" in a little sweatshop in Novi Pazar by Seljo, who is searching for a waitress for his café. He is from Gusinje, a town in Montenegro near the Albanian border. It proves to be a significant relocation for a young woman, and Žilnik highlights this fact by including a short stop on the trip: Seljo and Ivana enter a classroom, and on the school map Seljo points out where they are going—far away. The locals in Gusinje are Albanians, so Ivana has to learn their "language." She also meets a young man who is there on holiday from Brooklyn in the United States. Škeljzen would like to drive around in a Pontiac, but all that's available to lease is a Volkswagen Polo. He is one of many migrants to come into Žilnik's works, a predecessor especially of Kenedi. *Brooklyn – Gusinje* is not exactly a docudrama, but documentary work is at the core of the project. Žilnik introduces the female protagonist into a world he unfolds according to her experiences. The film's anthropological dimension (most prominent in a sort of speech a man gives about the duties of women and men) is also highlighted by the irony of Škeljzen and his older brother Bećir being strangers in their own world. *Brooklyn – Gusinje* is public broadcasting in its essence: it confronts the general Yugoslav audience with one of its "tribes" and highlights the varieties of peoples that make up the country by putting a "regular gal" in the midst of a group of regional natives.

Bećir Uljević and Lidija Stevanović in *Brooklyn–Gusinje* (film still), 1988

At the same time, any possible mythology of nativeness in Gusinje has already been tainted by emigration and its repercussions on the local economic and social spheres. While Yugoslavia was always an exporting country in terms of its workforce, during the socialist period it was also much more open to outside influences than the closed societies of the Eastern bloc.

Žilnik has come to negotiate the internal nationalisms of Yugoslavia with the developing essentialisms of neoliberal globalism. It makes sense that one of his most famous protagonists is a man who is Roma, the one nationality in Europe that is essentially a transnationality. Kenedi is from the city of Mitrovica, in what today is independent Kosovo (at the time it was part of Serbia). Žilnik met him in Belgrade as he was accompanying a Roma family deported from Germany on their way into uncertainty in Serbia. Kenedi is a character very much to Žilnik's taste: a hustler, a man constantly busy running things or organizing people to facilitate something that might include a small profit for himself. For a documentary filmmaker, someone like Kenedi is an ideal medium. His dominion is interference, and that is very much what Žilnik is about as well: he is not there to simply observe; he is there to become engaged, to show reality from the viewpoint of a friend. Solidarity and friendship are core tenets

of Žilnik's later engaged documentaries. He never aims to be the invisible fly on the wall common to strictly observational cinema (the most famous example being Frederick Wiseman), but he also refrains from engaging too heavily (as in the narrated, subjective documentaries of Nick Broomfield and the like).

Žilnik's most impressive feat is always finding those trickster protagonists who are not only themselves but also act as proper anchor characters, moderating and experiencing at the same time. Even in collective situations, as when he joined a workers' fight in Serbia in *The Old School of Capitalism* (2009), or in his road movie depicting the adventures of a retired Italian man bride shopping in the post-1989 landscapes of Eastern Europe (*Wanderlust*, 1998), he employs characters as much as he observes or directs them. Žilnik's method is probably most poignant in *Tito among the Serbs for the Second Time* (1994), because in this political comedy about a history that won't go away, the filmmaker blatantly reveals the concept of performativity that informs his documentary work: a man who looks like legendary state leader Josip Broz Tito appears in public spaces of post-Yugoslavia and causes all kinds of reactions. It is entirely justified to draw a line from here back to *Black Film*, in which Žilnik himself is the man in the main square asking painful questions in a playful way.

Žilnik's oeuvre took a different approach in the long run, which may also be ascribed to the systems he worked in: public television gave leeway to idiosyncratic ways of working, but from 1970 to 1990 did not require its makers to become protagonists in their own works. So Žilnik for the most part remained behind the camera but nevertheless became a highly recognizable subject of his genre: his humor, his revolutionary wit, and his deep compassion is mirrored in the people he picks to be the characters of his films. The modes of identification between director and protagonist mirror the modes of engagement for the potential audiences. In this manner, Žilnik and his immense body of work have become something like an integrative figure for cinema's foundational contradictions: reality and second reality and the position of the observer inside or outside either of those are in fact not opposing aspects but rather layers of the same reality. Even with nearly fifty titles, his body of work continues to be underrated. But there is growing recognition that not many filmmakers have earned a greater right to speak about "men," in the widest sense of this loaded term, than Želimir Žilnik. ★

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Joca Šokarda on the set of *The Old School of Capitalism*, 2009. PHOTO BY LEON ŠURBANOVIĆ.

However, in today's post–Cold War, "postideological" world, Marxists are few and far between. Amidst a historical reality distinguished by an all but total discrediting of the "utopia" of communist internationalism and a forceful onset of the supposedly much more "natural," particularist forms of identity politics—the most rampant among which are various ethnic essentialisms—one of the few remaining of the torch of Marxist Cinema is Želimir Žilnik. This in not so because his work has maintained the unaltered course of a radical aesthetico-political program, outlined back in the 1960s. Didactic cine-Marxism (of the kind once made famous by the Dziga Vertov Group) was, to begin with, never a trait of Žilink's filmmaking. His cinema today still successfully functions as a form of praxis simply because it remains committed, as passionately as it was four decades ago, to a total demystification of the processes of production in all their manifestations: film production and sociopolitical activity alike. When the dynamics of the production are made explicit, ideological delusions—be they Stalinist, liberal-democratic, or ethnonationalist—are more easily debunked. The notions of identity and community are thereby also, inevitably, submitted to critical reevaluation.

—Pavle Levi, in Pavle Levi and Želimir Žilnik, "Europe's Internal Exiles: Sound, Image, and Performance of Identity in Želimir Žilnik's Films," in *Ethnic Europe: Mobility, Identity, and Conflict in Globalized World,* ed. Roland Hsu (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 114 –15.

The routine cultural logic, in which the work of many artists who worked in socialist Yugoslavia was often presented, follows a simple formula: there was the official ideological mantra which created dogmatic, opportunistic culture; and, there was the rebellious opposition to this cultural numbness, displayed in the form of "dissident" political and artistic action. Both positions are mostly presented as seamless and without any internal contradictions: on the one hand we had political opportunism, hunger for power, ideological servitude, cultural uniformity, etc., whereas on the other there is a *man* (the dissident figure is almost always male) who suffers in such circumstances, a man who relentlessly achieves a creative distance from these circumstances, but a man who is a public figure and not some clandestine renegade. Some of the most "official" cultural products of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) were insisting on "artistic autonomy" and on creating a certain political and aesthetic distance from the direct visibility of ideology, and the example of Yugoslav modernist art, especially the flourishing trend of abstract painting and sculpture in the 1960s and 1970s. On the other hand, some artists who were identified as "dissident" were an integral part of the SFRY cultural policy. Their projects were, in one way or the other, financed through official channels (as there were no other channels through which ambitious cultural projects could be produced), so that it was these projects that represented [the] SFRY internationally as an open and free-thinking country, etc.

Želimir Žilnik had a very unique position within this ideological dichotomy.

—Branislav Dimitrijević, "Behind Scepticism Lies the Fire of a Revolutionary!," in *For an Idea – Against the Status Quo: Analysis and Systematization of Želimir Žilnik's Artistic Practice* (Novi Sad: New Media Center_kuda.org, Playground produkcija, 2009), 136–37.

Upon release the film was on the one hand critically acclaimed by the newly developing international film scene and on the other hand accompanied by uproar and scandals locally. It was a lucky coincidence that at the time there was great interest in the Yugoslav film production coming from the international audience. For example German TV would in that year buy 10—perhaps even 15—movies from the region to be screened on their channels.

My film got noticed by a German film critic from [the broadcaster] ARD who decided to buy it and it was this single purchase that paid off the whole investment in the film. The production cost us approximately 3,500 DEM and all the profit above that amount became our fee.

—Želimir Žilnik, in conversation with Dubravka Sekulić, Gal Kirn, and Žiga Testen, in *Surfing the Black: Yugoslav Black Wave Cinema and Its Transgressive Moments,* ed. Gal Kirn, Dubravka Sekulić, and Žiga Testen (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Academie, 2012), 67.

Milja Vujanović on the set of *Early Works*, 1968. PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

Early Works

Yugoslavia • 1969 • 87 min. • 35 mm • black & white

In an allegorical manner, *Early Works* recounts the story of young people who took part in student demonstrations in June 1968 in Belgrade, and, as its opening credits state, it includes "additional dialogue by Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels." Three young men and a girl, Jugoslava, defy the petit-bourgeois routine of everyday life. Wishing to "change the world," inspired by the writings of the young Marx, they go to the countryside and to factories to "wake up people's consciousness" and to encourage them to fight for emancipation and a life worth living. In the countryside, they face traditionalism and squalor, but they show their own limits, weaknesses, incapacities, and jealousy. They get arrested. Frustrated because the planned revolution has not been realized, the three young men decide to eliminate Jugoslava, who is the witness of their impotence. They shoot her, cover her with the Communist Party flag, and burn her body. A dark pillar of smoke rising into the sky is the only thing that remains of the intended revolution.

This was Žilnik's first feature film, produced by the biggest production house in Yugoslavia, Avala Film in Belgrade, and coproduced by Neoplanta Film in Novi Sad. The film passed the censorship commission in early March 1969 and premiered in Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Skopje. After three months of successful screening in cinemas throughout Yugoslavia, extensive polemics in the media, and the film's acceptance as an official selection of the Berlin International Film Festival, Žilnik was summoned to the office of the director of Avala Film. The night before, the film had been screened at the presidential residency. The screening was interrupted, and President Josip Broz Tito allegedly asked, "What do these lunatics want?" At Avala Film, Žilnik was asked to sign a statement that the film was still in the editing stage. He refused, arguing that both the professional and general public would see through it as a lie. That same day, all copies of the film were confiscated and the "Decision on the temporary ban on public screening of *Early Works*" was issued. Court proceedings started just a few days later. Since he had a law degree, Žilnik defended

himself and the film in court. The accusations were dismissed and the film was shown at the Berlin International Film Festival a week later, where it won the Golden Bear for Best Film and an Award for Young Generation. That same summer, the film won several awards at Pula Film Festival.

The film stirred up much controversy among Yugoslavia's political establishment, particularly due to symbolic, but also fairly explicit, reflections on the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet tanks in August 1968, as well as due to portraying the manipulation and persecution of the student activists who organized protests in Belgrade in June 1968. As a consequence, the Party Committee in Novi Sad organized an ideological campaign that proclaimed the movie to be anarchistic. Žilnik was criticized as being "under the influence of [Leon] Trotsky and Rudi Dutschke" and was expelled from the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. The film was withdrawn from domestic movie distribution, but at the same time, the official state exporter, Yugoslavia Film, distributed it in more than thirty countries around the world. The next time *Early Works* was to be shown in Yugoslavia was nearly twenty years later, in 1987, on state television.

The debate surrounding *Early Works* was huge across all parts of Yugoslavia and in various media, from daily newspapers to popular and specialized magazines. Many of the articles also published Žilnik's closing arguments of his court defense:

> The prosecutor is trying to prove the political offense of the film *Early Works*. He is mystifying the content of the film and its protagonists, and is trying to present it as a document about a particular event, and then claiming that the event did not take place as it was presented. The prosecutor does not even understand the medium of the feature film at all. He does not realize that the only possible offense of the film is its artistic failure. But if it really is a bad film, it is not for the prosecutor to prove it.
>
> However, all the prosecutor's actions—a motion for a temporary ban, an unsupported argument, his refusal of evidence, etc.—these are no longer things from an artistic film, these are things from our real life, these are the political acts that we should seriously think about. By these political acts, the prosecutor really is deeply depreciating, I would not say all the contemporary settings of social relations, as he claims *Early Works* does—I would be even more specific: by acting in such a political manner, the prosecutor is severely depreciating the progressive, anti-dogmatic, self-management principles of social relations. By acting in this way, he is glorifying, supporting, and developing other types of "modern principles" of social relations: bureaucratic, dogmatic, anti-self-managing. With his actions, he is trying to prove the following in real life and not in an art film: that confusion and irresponsibility rule the authorities who practice self-management in this country; that "we are not yet ready for self-management"; that the social authorities comprising professionals and politicians do not worry about social interest, and that, instead of them, only the state authorities should be in charge of the social interest. This is what the prosecutor is trying to say by banning the film four months after it has been part of the regular cinema repertoire, and after it has been approved and evaluated by the competent bodies of self-management and social authorities.
>
> Furthermore, the prosecutor is trying to prove that irresponsibility prevails in the information media of this country, that there is incompetence, and that "things should be put in order here, too." He doubts the value of the principles of freedom and responsibility of the press. He ignores the fact that the film has been rated by fifteen news media, three of them bodies of the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia, and two bodies of the Youth Alliance. He believes that state control should be established over these media. Thirdly, the prosecutor doubts the international reputation of Yugoslavia. He claims that when, in his opinion, a bad Yugoslav film appears abroad, the world will immediately identify this film with Yugoslavia and its politics, and that we will consequently suffer. The prosecutor obviously does not know the scope of film and does not understand how his dogmatic political behavior not based on real arguments is far more dangerous for the reputation of our country than any film. ●

Early Works (opening titles), 1969. DESIGNED BY SLOBODAN MAŠIĆ.

Early Works (poster), 1969.
DESIGNED BY SLOBODAN MAŠIĆ.

FOLLOWING PAGES
Early Works (on-set photos), 1968.
PHOTOS BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

Bogdan Tirnanić and Želimir Žilnik

Marko Nikolić and Milja Vujanović

BORIS BUDEN

Shoot It Black! An Introduction to Želimir Žilnik

It's not easy facing up when your whole world is black.
—The Rolling Stones, "Paint It Black," 1966

It is usually said that Želimir Žilnik is one of the most prominent directors of the Black Wave, a tendency in Yugoslav film that emerged in the wake of the political and economic liberalization of the country in the 1960s and '70s, and presents the best that Yugoslavia had produced culturally in its short-lived history.[01] But what does it actually mean to be a protagonist in this cultural story from the Communist past? To what does "black" concretely refer in the famous phrase the "Black Wave"? Let us start with this simple question.

The newspaper article from 1969 in which the notion of the Black Wave was first introduced opens from a curious perspective.[02] The author looks at the reality of Yugoslavia from the future of several decades on—thus from today's present—and argues that this future will not be able to find "our true picture." That is, the authentic picture of Yugoslav society of that time is not in the "yellowed yearbooks of the contemporary daily press," for "this informative level stored in the archives and computer brains will fade into oblivion," but instead in the art made at the time. The future, as he states, will not believe those who had directly witnessed the actual reality but rather the "condensed and suggestive artistic story and picture that this reality produced."[03] In his view, this is why the future will have a black picture of Yugoslav society of the 1960s and '70s—because Yugoslav art, and above all Yugoslav film, painted this society black.

Early Works (on-set photo), 1968. PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

01 Inspired by Italian Neorealism and various new waves in European cinema, the authors of Black Wave rejected the norms and ideals of an optimistic, self-congratulatory official culture and openly exposed the dark side of socialist society—above all its ideologically hidden capitalist truth that emerged with the implementation of the market economy and its devastating social consequences like unemployment, massive migrations of workers both within the country and abroad, poverty, crime, etc. The most prominent directors along with Žilnik were: Živojin Pavlović, Bato Čengić, Dušan Makavejev, and Aleksandar Petrović.

02 Vladimir Jovičić, "'Crni val' u našem filmu," *Borba*, Belgrade, August 3, 1969, 17–24. All translations the author's.

03 Jovičić, "Crni val," 17.

Isn't it interesting? In a society ruled by Communists one would expect the voice of the Party to be at the same time the voice of the history itself—which *Borba*, the newspaper where this article appeared, undoubtedly was[04]—and not to tremble before this history helplessly expecting its final judgment. "What will the future think of us?" This is not the question of those who are supposed to know the course of history and legitimize their rule precisely from this very future. Moreover, no law of historical materialism, no Marxist concept, however undogmatic and creatively enlightened, would endow art, that superstructural phenomenon, with the power to give the only "true picture" of society and even to be the last word of history itself. And yet this is the logic on which the argument against the Black Wave filmmakers relies. *Borba*'s critic accuses them of betrayal. But betrayal of what? Not, primarily, of reality: they are not so much blamed for having unfaithfully represented reality in their films—for painting it more black than it really is—but rather their real "crime" consists in misrepresenting the society they belong to. So when the critic uses the notion of a "true picture of our society," it is not so much the "truth" that is at stake here—that is, a realistic representation of social life—but "the picture of the society" that he is actually concerned about. He complains that society, in the Black Wave films, "dresses in rags before taking pictures of itself." But by that he obviously doesn't mean that it should take off its clothes and expose itself in full nakedness, as it really is.

This apparently slight shift in accentuation from "truth" to "picture" has far-reaching consequences. The real conflict between the critic and the "traitors" doesn't take place where we usually project it from our postcommunist perspective: between Communist ideology on one side and the autonomy of art on the other. The case of Yugoslav "Black Wave" is definitely not that of ideologically stubborn communist apparatchiks who try to impose the dogma of (Socialist) Realism on freedom-loving artists. Moreover, it is not even the socialist cause that the critic insists upon: the well-known discourse on the social function of art, of its programmatic role in building a new society, of its educational duties, for instance, in boosting optimism. A classical discourse of Socialist Realism is totally absent from this polemical text.[05] Rather, he argues that the problem with the pessimism of which he, and through his voice the Party itself, accuses the Black Wave filmmakers is not that it spreads defeatism and so disarms the progressive forces of society, but rather that it spreads an unflattering picture of Yugoslav society. This is what the whole drama is about: how the society represents itself to the Other, both the Other abroad and the Other of posterity. Specifically, the authors of "Black Films" are blamed for "clownishly presenting the nation and the society for the sake of a cheap and ephemeral mundane fame." In the eyes of the critic they are guilty of submission to the fashionable taste of the international market.

In support of his criticism, he naturally calls on authorities. However, these are not Marx, Engels, or Lenin, nor any of the Yugoslav Marxists or leading Party intellectuals. It is instead Bosley Crowther, legendary film critic for the *New York Times* and at that time art director of Columbia Pictures, who is quoted from an interview he gave at that time to a Yugoslav magazine:

> You Yugoslavs [...] you are so vital [...] you know how to look at women, you can laugh from the heart, you are open, there is an original joy of life in you. Why then are your films so bitter, so dark? What is the truth? You as I have seen you, or you as you present yourselves in the films? [...] Or is this all in your film a temporary fashion of pessimism which, with a certain delay, comes to your authors from abroad?[06]

Thus we have the official position of the Party on cultural issues at the time drawing its arguments from an identification with a Western-Orientalist gaze that imagined Yugoslavia as an exotic realm of authentic enjoyment of life and natural vitality.

04
For this reason I do not mention the name of the author of this particular article explicitly in this text. His personality is of secondary importance, since his personal and public opinion at that time was immediately identified as the opinion of the Party itself.

05
Indeed, the author explicitly distances himself from any concept of an "educational" function of art. For him it is "didactically old-fashioned to ascribe any functional attribute to art." The idea that a work of art should deliver some sort of message he also puts aside as Zhdanovism, the party doctrine on Soviet arts and culture developed by the Central Committee Secretary Andrei Zhdanov in 1946. Moreover, he openly writes that he would have some understanding for the "blackness" of Yugoslav film only if it would stay within the "art for art's sake" concept of art. Jovičić, "Crni val," 9.

Early Works (on-set photo), 1968. PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

06
Jovičić, "Crni val," 20.

But the question of representation becomes even more dramatic from the perspective of the future, or in relation to posterity. Again, at stake is the picture of the society that will survive it in works of art, or as *Borba*'s critic writes, "a picture of us that is going to be bequeathed" to the future. He insists that we shouldn't be indifferent to this "sort of recognition," for if the art is now painting this picture black, the future too will have a black picture of us.

Writing from a contemporary perspective, this all is to suggest that we must necessarily abandon our postcommunist perspective if we really want to understand what that "blackness" ascribed to a great deal of Yugoslav film production at the end of the 1960s really was about. Not only because of all those unbearable clichés about the communist past (whose real ideological effect is not so much in blackening the utopia of the past but rather in brightening the actual one about liberal democracy and capitalism as the only exit solution of world history), but because there is one more, even better reason: the notion of the Black Wave was coined from this postcommunist perspective itself.

Black Wave is obviously a concept forged in struggle, and it implicates a certain instrumentalization of art in that struggle. But what struggle? Not the one for a better—for instance, a just, classless, in short, communist—society. Here we are definitely not dealing with a story about art being (unjustly) caught in a social struggle. From the point of view of the critic who introduced the slogan "Black Wave," the social struggle was already over, or more precisely, the social cause of the struggle had become obsolete. However, the struggle went on, but in another form, on another battlefield, and for another cause. Now it was the struggle for recognition that was fought exclusively on the field of culture. What was at stake in this struggle was now *identity*.

It sounds paradoxical, but the position from which the voice of the Party announced its *j'accuse* against the Black Wave filmmakers was the position of an already dead society—a society that had exhausted all its utopian potential and had reached the limits of its further expansion in terms of social justice and an overall social prosperity. It was a society that was facing its historical end, a society with no future whatsoever. It literally didn't see itself in the future, or, better, it saw only an alienated picture of itself there, a picture that had been already appropriated by art, by the Black Wave films. This is why our understanding of the Black Wave cannot be reduced to a postcommunist cliché about art struggling with society for its freedom. On the contrary, it is about a society struggling with art for the "true" picture of itself, a society in the final struggle for its cultural survival. In launching this struggle in 1969, the communist critics of the Black Wave precisely proved to be postcommunists long before all those democrats who would replace them later. They knew very well that they were no longer in command of history, but were still able to anticipate its development. Moreover, by occupying

Early Works (on-set photos), 1968. PHOTOS BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT Čedomir Radović, Bogdan Tirnanić, Milja Vujanović, and Marko Nikolić.

BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT Bogdan Tirnanić, Milja Vujanović, Marko Nikolić, and Čedomir Radović.

Piroška Čapko and Milja Vujanović on the set of *Early Works*, 1968. PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

themselves exclusively with the question of cultural representations, they had already accomplished that notorious cultural turn that would be later ascribed to postmodernism as one of its main features. Yugoslav communists of that time already looked at the society they were in charge of from the point of view of its cultural afterlife.

Of course, politically the Party was still identified with its historical mission—to radically change the society for the better—and still saw itself as being able to achieve this goal. But this, to use Lacanian terms, existed only on the imaginary level of their identification. In short, this was how Yugoslav communists identified with the ideal picture of themselves, with their ideal-ego. However, at the same time, but on a symbolical level, they identified with the gaze of the history itself—i.e., with their ego-ideal—in which they saw the society they had built surviving only in a cultural translation that fully escapes their control. They ruled society, but only in an imaginary realm. Symbolically, they had already lost it, they had surrendered society to culture. For them, in 1969, the challenge was no longer to build a new, better society, but rather to properly represent the dead one. Thus, a true picture of social reality still seemed to be possible, but only in an anticipated cultural retrospective. This also marks a move within Realism itself: from its socially prospective dimension (the concept of Socialist Realism deployed in the service of society as a utopian project) to a culturally retrospective Realism. The latter is no less ideologically dogmatic than the former. The name of the dogma now is cultural memory—the only form in which social experience is still available to us today, in retrospect of course. The Party knew this in 1969.

Now, we could probably answer the introductory question: To what does "black" refer in the notion of the Black Wave of Yugoslav cinema? It refers primarily to the end of society, to the experience of the abyss that opens up at this end, to that bottomless contingency one encounters after a social experiment—or, better, after the human experimentation with the social has been historically exhausted. It is the blackness that has absorbed all the utopian light that had hitherto clearly illuminated society's path to the future. In its subjective dimension, it is the darkness of the fear we are filled with when we face, existentially, the terminality of society—that is, when we become aware of the possibility of its total absence, in short, a social fear in its ontological dimension.[07] This is best expressed in the words of one of the most famous actors of the Yugoslav Black Wave, Bekim Fehmiu, who acted in European and Hollywood productions as well. In *Borba*'s article, Fehmiu is quoted as saying: "We have never lived better and yet, everything is black before our eyes."[08]

However, to calm this fear and to pacify this ambivalence, a fetish was introduced: the fetish of cultural identity that also implied, within the political concept of sovereignty, national identity. At that time—the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the '70s in Yugoslavia—there was a major shift in the way the Communist Party

07 In terms of Heideggerian *Angst* that makes a subject experience society's being-toward-death.

08 Bekim Fehmiu, quoted in Jovičić, "Crni val," 20.

legitimized its rule. The narrative of class struggle was essentially abandoned. The Party stopped conceiving of itself as the vanguard of a universal history that would lead it to its classless end, communism. Instead it began to legitimate its rule within the history of a particular nation by identifying itself as its political elite, which, after having finally accomplished the goal of national liberation and achieved full national sovereignty, was leading the (nationally framed) society into progress under the given historical conditions of a socialist, regulated market economy and open participation in international *Realpolitik* and global capitalism. In short: the communist leaders of this era did not aim to adapt society to the communist utopia. Rather, they adapted the communist utopia to a society that had fully identified itself with its nation. Of course, this fundamentally changes the situation on the so-called cultural front. The communists were no longer fighting in the trenches against the traditional bourgeois culture that was devoted to creating essentialist identities of the Yugoslav nations—Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Bosnians, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Albanians, etc. Rather, they made a nonaggression pact with it—"you leave politics to us, we leave national culture to you" (with a few clearly defined exceptions)—and so even strengthened their identitarian, that is, national, legitimation. To stay in the saddle they had to remount a fresh horse of identity politics, and were now riding it blindly into the catastrophe of the 1990s.[09]

LEFT TO RIGHT Čedomir Radović, Marko Nikolić, Bogdan Tirnanić, and Milja Vujanović on the set of *Early Works*, 1968. PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

09
With the new constitution of 1974, multiculturalism became the official ideology of the Yugoslav state. The discourse on social justice didn't simply disappear from Yugoslav politics. It was translated into the new language of identity politics, which dominated the political public—not, however, as an intra-social cause but rather as an inter-national one. The question of an (un)just redistribution is now posed not in relation of one class of society to another, but rather in relation of one republic—one nation—of Yugoslav (con)federation to another. This is clearly a postsocialist turn, as defined by Nancy Fraser in her *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition* (London: Routledge, 1997), 2: it demonstrates a shift away "from a socialist political imaginary, in which the central problem of justice is redistribution, to a 'postsocialist' political imaginary, in which the central problem of justice is recognition."

Milja Vujanović and Marko Nikolić on the set of *Early Works*, 1968. PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

To sum it up: identity or, in a slightly broader sense, cultural identification, was what from then on was able to offer a perspective of a life after the end of society. No wonder almost all grasped for it. But not all indeed. Some preferred not to.

The most prominent among those who entered the darkness at the end of society with their eyes—and the lenses of their cameras—wide open was and still is Želimir Žilnik, whose entire filmic opus, extending over almost half a century, represents the most radical and consistent expression of its "blackness."

Moreover, Žilnik is the only one of the Black Wave filmmakers who explicitly responded to the official accusation: "You are blaming me for making black films. So be it, then." In 1971, he shot a documentary that he titled literally *Black Film*.[10] Žilnik picked up six homeless people from the street and brought them to his home, not only to share the warmth of a middle-class apartment (it was January), but also to actively participate in making a film about their problems. (This would become typical of Žilnik's documentary drama: allowing his amateur actors, whom the film story is about, to consciously participate in its making, or, in other words, to play themselves.)[11] The next day on the streets of Novi Sad, he used his camera to inquire about how to solve the problem of homeless people in the city. Neither the passersby nor the officials have an answer to this question. The filmmaker himself doesn't have it either, for "these stinky people," as he calls them in the film, cannot stay in his flat forever. So, finally, after telling them that no solution to this problem has been found and that he is running out of tape, Žilnik asks those people to leave his home.

10
Black Film was featured in the film program of documenta 12 (2007), curated by Alexander Horwath.

11
"I do not hide from the people I am shooting the fact that I am making a film. On the contrary. I help them to recognise their own situation and to express their position to it as efficiently as they can, and they help me to create a film about them in the best possible way." Žilnik, interview, *Dnevnik*, Novi Sad, April 14, 1968. Quoted in Dominika Prejdová, "Socially Engaged Cinema According to Želimir Žilnik," in *For an Idea — Against the Status Quo: Analysis and Systematization of Želimir Žilnik's Artistic Practice*. (Novi Sad: New Media Center_kuda.org, Playground produkcija, 2009), 164.

Again: what is black in this "Black Film"? The reality it depicts? The failure of communists to solve social problems? The notorious gap between a utopian promise and reality? No! It is the film itself, the very idea of art, especially film art, claiming power to change social reality—this is what is really black in *Black Film*. In fact, it begins with the author saying to the camera: "I used to make these films two years ago, but such people [the homeless] are still here."

The film is a radically honest self-reflexive critique of the idea and practice of so-called socially engaged cinema. Žilnik openly considers *Black Film* as being his own tomb. In a manifesto published on the occasion of the 1971 film festival where the film premiered, he calls the whole festival a "graveyard."[12] Black here refers to the "misery of an abstract humanism"[13] and to the "socially engaged film that has become a ruling fashion in our bourgeois cinematography";[14] it refers to its false avant-gardism, social demagogy, and left-wing phraseology; to its abuse of a socially declassed people for the purposes of film; to the filmmakers' exploitation of social misery, etc.[15] But what is even more important is that black doesn't refer at all to a "lack of freedom," which is usually presented from today's postcommunist perspective as the worst "blackness" of the communist past. Already in 1971, Žilnik explicitly stated: "They left us our freedom, we were liberated, but ineffective."[16] Black refers to a chasm that no freedom can bridge, a chasm that will survive the fall of communism.

Extras and Milja Vujanović on the set of *Early Works*, 1968. PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

12
Želimir Žilnik, "This Festival Is a Graveyard," in *XVII. Westdeutsche Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen*, ed. Will Wehling (Oberhausen: Westdeutsche Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen, 1971).

13
Želimir Žilnik, quoted in Heinz Klunker, "Soziale Experimente," in Wehling, *XVII. Westdeutsche Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen*, 23.

14
Žilnik, "This Festival Is a Graveyard." 24.

15
Želimir Žilnik, quoted in Klunker, "Soziale Experimente," 23.

16
Žilnik, quoted in Klunker, "Soziale Experimente," 23. Reporting from the festival in Belgrade, the same German critic, Heinz Klunker, criticizes Žilnik for seeing the situation "too darkly" and for underestimating the freedom that filmmakers in Yugoslavia have been granted, a freedom that Žilnik, as Klunker writes, "equates with pure complacency." Heinz Klunker, "Leute, Filme und Politik in Belgrad," *Deutsches Allgemeine Sonntagsblatt*, Hamburg, March 28, 1971.

LEFT TO RIGHT Želmira Žujović, Milja Vujanović, and Slobodan Aligrudić on the set of *Early Works*, 1968. PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

Bogdan Tirnanić (on ground) and Čedomir Radović on the set of *Early Works*, 1968.
PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

17
Žilnik, "This Festival Is a Graveyard," 24.

For Žilnik, a film, and in a broader sense, culture, however liberated from totalitarian oppression, will never provide a remedy for social misery. For him the emancipatory promise of culture is a bluff. In his mocking the authors of the socially engaged films from 1971 who search "for the most picturesque wretch that is prepared to convincingly suffer,"[17] he already makes fun of the liberal inclusivism that twenty years later would impose its normative dogmatism on the cultural producers of the new (and old) democracies. We know that picture very well: one discovers somewhere on the fringes of society the victims of exclusion, those poor subaltern creatures with no face and no voice. But luckily there is an artist around to help them show their faces and make their voices heard. How nice: what a bad society has excluded, a good art can include again. For, as one believes, what has been socially marginalized can always be made culturally central, that is, brought to light—to the transparency of the public sphere—from the dark fringes of society. The rest is a democratic routine: a benevolent civil society, sympathetic to the suffering of the poor and excluded, makes a political case of the social darkness; and as soon as the party politics is involved, a political solution searched for and finally found, a low is changed, a democracy is reborn, now more inclusive than ever before.

Not with me, answers Želimir Žilnik, already in 1971. He, who has been working his entire life with different kinds of so-called marginalized people—from street children, unemployed and homeless people, to transvestites, illegal migrants, Roma, etc.—knows well what their "blackness" is about. It is about where the society as society is absent and about what politics, however democratic, cannot represent: a "blackness," which is rapidly swallowing that light we have historically gathered around. ★

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LEFT TO RIGHT Milja Vujanović, Bogdan Tirnanić, and Čedomir Radović on the set of *Early Works*, 1968. PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

LEFT TO RIGHT Milja Vujanović, Dragana Đurić, Branko Vučićević, and Alenka Zdešar on the set of *Freedom or Cartoons*, 1971. PHOTO BY KARPO GODINA.

Freedom or Cartoons

Yugoslavia • 1972 • unfinished • 35 mm • color

Through the story of Svetozar, a successful independent salesman from Vojvodina, and the children he had out of wedlock in several cities in Yugoslavia (Zagreb, Belgrade, Ljubljana, and Skopje), *Freedom or Cartoons* recounted turbulent political events of the summer of 1971. The film incorporated documentary footage of events in Zagreb, capturing a wave of national awakening and the arrival of young politicians as the leaders of the students' organization; the pro-Mao student demonstrations in Ljubljana; and, in Belgrade, the inflammatory debates for and against the changes to the Yugoslav Constitution.

After heated public debates surrounding Žilnik's *Early Works*, released in 1969, and Dušan Makavejev's *W.R.: Mysteries of the Organism*, released in 1971, as well as attacks on both films for their anarchism and supposed anti-communism, the director of the production house Neoplanta Film, Svetozar Udovički, was removed from his position. The new director requested that Žilnik remove from *Freedom or Cartoons* the footage of the events in Zagreb and Ljubljana, which at that time were under police investigation, as well as the "parts with unacceptable political allusions." Although the premiere was expected to take place at Pula Film Festival, after Žilnik refused to make these cuts, the film was stopped in its editing process in 1972 and never finished. Recently part of a non-edited film negative was found, the sound of which has been lost, and Žilnik is now looking into the possibility of making a reconstructed version. ●

Freedom or Cartoons (on-set photos), 1971.
PHOTOS BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.
TOP LEFT Alenka Zdešar.
TOP RIGHT Alenka Zdešar and Dragana Đurić.
BOTTOM Alenka Zdešar.

Freedom or Cartoons (on-set photos), 1971.
PHOTOS BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.
LEFT Alenka Zdešar.
RIGHT Čedomir Radović and Dragana Đurić.

Žilnik has always managed to point to a blind spot of ideology, or to some highly controversial symptom of the impotence of an ideology appearing as operating in accordance [with] its declared principles.

—Branislav Dimitrijević, "Behind Scepticism Lies the Fire of a Revolutionary!," in *For an Idea – Against the Status Quo: Analysis and Systematization of Želimir Žilnik's Artistic Practice* (Novi Sad: New Media Center_kuda.org, Playground produkcija, 2009), 145.

Each film made by Želimir Žilnik is an exercise in creating a new and authentic human collective; an attempt in inserting this collective as deeply as possible into the existing social fabric. This is, ultimately, why these films are at the same time fictional and documentary, and why they can hardly be otherwise: their protagonists are always playacting, regardless of whether they are portraying themselves (through documentary reenactments) or someone else (as characters defined within the framework of acted fiction). Žilnik's cinematographic subjects are the laborers and operatives of a (permanently) approaching film commune.

—Pavle Levi, in Pavle Levi and Želimir Žilnik, "Europe's Internal Exiles: Sound, Image, and Performance of Identity in Želimir Žilnik's films," in *Ethnic Europe: Mobility, Identity, and Conflict in a Globalized World,* ed. Roland Hsu (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 122.

One moment we're talking about warriors and war victories, and already in the next these people are accused of being members of the paramilitary, of being new profiteers. Some people are at one point in the parliament and at another victims of the gang wars in Belgrade. We have the criminalization of the entire scene, the crush of the whole system of values, while a new system has not been established. These groups of people are on the one hand on the margins and on the other in a situation where they can feel the pulse of society.

When I talked to prostitutes and transvestites while making this film [*Marble Ass*], I learned that in some periods, they spent two or three months [living] in a Hyatt, driving around in super luxury cars. They were in that part of society that feels safe. It's the same with warriors. There are documents in newspapers that show that many of the so-called solo players [self-enlisted soldiers] who followed the "call of the nation" were actually connected to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the police, social organizations, municipalities. They went to war in an organized manner. I want to say that the film we made is not far from the main current of that life that we all endure. And that life itself is an enormous effort of walking the tightrope between war and peace: from the fact that we're in one moment enemies and then in the next friends with the whole world, through the fear about where we'll go once the bombing starts, to the present euphoria caused by seeing our footballers playing internationally.

—Želimir Žilnik, interview, "Contributions for a Biography," *Ekran 2000,* no. 2, 1995.

Uprising in Jazak (on-set photo), 1972.
PHOTO BY MILIVOJE MILIVOJEVIĆ.

DIJANA JELAČA

Double Binds: The Politics of Gender and Sexuality in the Films of Želimir Žilnik

Since his earliest works, Želimir Žilnik has been a consistently provocative explorer of the politics of gender and sexuality. A more standard, epochal approach to Žilnik's work might separate the films he made during the so-called New Yugoslav Film movement (which lasted for about a decade, approximately 1962 to 1972) from the rest of his oeuvre, or perhaps such an approach would create a differentiation between the films he made during his Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav periods. This essay, by contrast, will illustrate how Žilnik's work reflects, across historical, social, geographical, and cultural epochs, a consistent and keen cinematic attention to the intersecting political domains of class, identity, gender performativity, and performance. To wit, one of Žilnik's frequent points of interest is the political dimensions of gender and sexuality, particularly as they intersect with the contingent social and cultural issues of the specific locales and times in which the director's films were made.

Žilnik's early documentary short *Little Pioneers* (1968) announces what will turn out to be the director's lifelong interest in social outcasts—individuals and groups on society's margins, systemically discriminated against and often rendered entirely invisible. In this short, Žilnik gives visibility and voice to poor and homeless children, most of them Roma. As the camera shows the children, some of them disabled, running through abandoned, decrepit houses, the voice-over narration gives us the children's often shocking testimonials about their everyday life, from the petty crimes they engage in to the police violence they are frequently subjected to. That the film is called *Little Pioneers* is an overt and provocative political intervention in and of itself: the phrase is the first verse of a popular children's song about Yugoslavia's children as little pioneers who are honorable, decent, healthy, and obedient—proper soldiers of the socialist state. The children in Žilnik's documentary are on the opposite end of the spectrum from Yugoslavia's socialist youth idolized in the children's song. By juxtaposing the song and its overt implications about Yugoslav youth with stark images of the poverty, neglect, and grittiness experienced and embodied by the children in the film, Žilnik provocatively and insightfully calls attention to what is otherwise rendered invisible or willfully ignored by the official ideology of Yugoslavia, a society whose citizens, and particularly its children, are conceived as unwaveringly honorable and exemplary.

But the film does not stop at the shocking positioning of the rough street children as being worlds apart from the dominant image of Yugoslavia's children as innocent and hard-working pioneers. As the children's testimonials unfold, an unmistakable pattern emerges: stories of unwanted sexual advances and looming threats of sexual violence that the girls frequently experience in encounters with adult men are described by some of them through voice-over in detailed and startlingly matter-of-fact terms. In fact, the short's final few minutes (separated from the rest of the film by the intertitle "The

Little Pioneers (film stills), 1968

Next Episode") are dedicated solely to this topic: first, a young man tells us that he often has sex with girls, and that sometimes the girls are willing participants, and sometimes not. He asserts that some of them need to be forced to have sex with him, and he does so by applying "a few slaps and things like that." As he talks, the camera pans over a few other young men socializing, talking, and laughing. The young man's testimonial is abruptly interrupted by a shot of a young girl seen in profile, who tells the story of being offered money by a stranger in exchange for sex. She accepts the offer only after she is able to negotiate double the amount. Her story is likewise interrupted, by another girl who speaks about a sexual assault she experienced when a man held her at knifepoint in an attempt to rape her. Here, interestingly, Žilnik inserts himself into the film: as the harrowing account is heard in voice-over, we see the director facing the girl and giving the camera the "action" cue (FIG. 1).

FIGURE 1: The filmmaker and his subject. *Little Pioneers* (film still), 1968.

By putting himself into his own film—in fact, by showing himself direct it—at this key moment, Žilnik calls attention to the camera's presence, and his own: an adult man filming a young girl who is recounting details of a traumatic assault by another man. In rendering himself and his directing visible here, Žilnik acknowledges the power imbalances, particularly in relation to gender and age, that frame the politics of representation in the film. After the shot, the screen turns to black while the voice-over continues: the girl describes being warned by the man who assaulted her to not tell anyone about it. She answered back that she would tell no one dumber than him, but that she would instead tell her story to someone smarter. Here again, the presence of the storytelling apparatus—the camera, the filmmaker, and the film crew—is directly pointed to, interrupting a seamless depiction of a testimonial that would otherwise aim to render the presence of said mechanism invisible. After that, we see the action cue in front of the girl's face once more, as her voice-over tells us that the man who assaulted her now threatens to kill her, "but has not put that into action yet." Her story ends on this unnerving note of a threat hanging in the air. The film's final frame shows another girl, who informs us that she is not yet eighteen and has not yet had sex with men, but thinks "it is a nice thing." This ending note serves as another counterpoint that further layers the narrative of girlhood, sexuality, and agency, complicating it by refusing to depict the girls solely through the framework of violence, victimhood, precarity, and threat. Nevertheless, their girlhood is unquestionably vulnerable. Even within the already precarious population of the poor homeless children, there are further degrees of vulnerability, and girls appear to be at the bottom of the hierarchy. They are in a double bind: vulnerable not only because they are poor and therefore socially ostracized but also because they are girls.

Credits for Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the opening titles of *Early Works*, 1969. TITLES DESIGNED BY SLOBODAN MAŠIĆ.

Drawing an intertextual link between his films, and between documentary and fiction, one of the girls who appears in *Little Pioneers*, Piroška "Pirika" Čapko, appears in Žilnik's feature narrative debut, *Early Works* (1969), as a younger sister of the female protagonist, Jugoslava. In the spirit of Žilnik's organic collaboration with nonprofessional actors across the documentary-narrative spectrum, Čapko went on to become the director's subject in more recent works as well: in 2013, for the documentary *Pirika on Film*, as well as in 2018, for the documentary *Among the People: Life & Acting*. The latter, commissioned for Žilnik's exhibition at the Edith-Russ-Haus for Media Art, aptly titled *Shadow Citizens*, sees Žilnik return to many participants of his earlier films, who revisit the stories of their collaborations with the director.

In Žilnik's now legendary *Early Works*, gender politics arises yet again as an important subtext and, I contend, a crucial aspect of the social critique that the film lays out. One of the earliest lines that Jugoslava, a young woman from a poor working-class background, utters is: "I get why my father beats my mom. He's all beaten up after work." In other words, at home the father perpetuates the violence he endures in the outside world due to his lack of agency as a social actor. In these early scenes, we often see Jugoslava's father drunkenly digging up a toilet in muddy ground. Precarious social conditions that precipitate and perpetuate gendered and domestic violence are therefore immediately put front and center, and overtly serve as an important motivating factor for Jugoslava to take up a revolutionary cause with her three male companions. The four youth often quote or read directly from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *Communist Manifesto* and Marx's *Capital* (indeed, Marx and Engels are credited as contributors to the film's screenplay, alongside Žilnik and Branko Vučićević), in what the intertitles deem "political theater." But this theater is not a performance separate from everyday life; rather, it becomes a performance of politics *in* everyday life.

After Jugoslava's father returns from work drunk one day, a physical altercation ensues between him, his wife, and Jugoslava. This prompts Jugoslava to declare that "feudalism reigns in this house," and she announces to her family that they are seeing her for the last time. Just before she leaves home, she stops in front of the house to give her younger sister (the aforementioned girl who appears in *Little Pioneers*) a bite out of an apple (FIG. 2)—a symbolic gesture that acknowledges the older sister's effort to pass on knowledge, as well as strength and resilience, to the younger sister who stays behind. Precarious girlhood is yet again given critical attention and, for Jugoslava, serves as a key trigger that moves her to political action.

FIGURE 2: Jugoslava (Milja Vujanović) gives her younger sister (Pirika Čapko) a bite of her apple. *Early Works* (film still), 1969.

Together with her male companions, Jugoslava embarks on a tour of Serbia's rural areas to propagate a socialist revolution. Her relationship with her male friends is frequently punctuated by sexual tension, but also permeated by an encroaching threat of violence toward her. For instance, after her first sexual encounter with one of the men, she teases him for not being able to immediately have sex again, which prompts him to point a gun at her as we hear the sound of (for the moment, imaginary) gunfire. This mock shooting foreshadows the looming gendered violence that will dramatically materialize by the film's end.

In one striking scene, during which the group is bringing their revolutionary ideas to the countryside, Jugoslava is seen holding a workshop for village women to educate them on the best methods of contraception (FIG. 3). The women, all nonprofessional actors, pose various questions, from the consequences of abstinence on health to which contraceptive method is proven most effective. In her talk, Jugoslava cites the revolutionary thoughts of the leftist feminist icon Clara Zetkin, namely that revolutions cannot happen "until the man of the family stops behaving like a lord, an aristocrat and an owner, while a woman is exploited like a proletarian. Women can be freed from submission *only* through changing the structure of employment and through the disintegration of the monogamous family." Here Jugoslava brings forth a very pointed critique of real existing socialism: while the proletariat is nominally put in charge and on equal footing in socialist systems, women continue to be oppressed subjects under the autocratic rule of men due to ongoing patriarchal gender dynamics. As a result, a true revolution cannot happen without disposing of this gender hierarchy—a disposal that, importantly, includes the monogamous family. Furthermore, a woman's right to not bear children, nor be saddled with unwanted reproductive and domestic labor, should be recognized as a legitimate demand. That Jugoslava is here addressing a group located at the very bottom of the social hierarchy—uneducated rural women—makes her critique all the more poignant. These women, like the poor girls in *Little Pioneers*, experience precarity as a double bind. Gender and class intersect once again to provide critical insight into the unequal distribution of social agency in Socialist Yugoslavia. This scene is, somewhat humorously, followed by male voices exclaiming, "Long live the 8th of March, International Women's Day!," a widely celebrated holiday in Yugoslavia during which women's rights were often only nominally acknowledged.

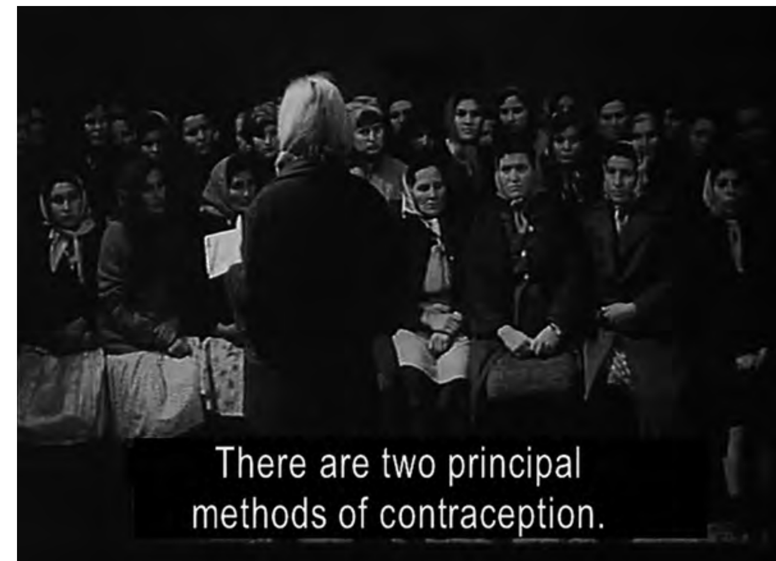

FIGURE 3: Jugoslava (Milja Vujanović) addresses a group of rural women. *Early Works* (film still), 1969.

In her speech to the women, Jugoslava adds that "a technological revolution, one that we are marching towards," will finally lead to women's full emancipation. Echoing this claim about technology in a later scene, Jugoslava somewhat bitterly proclaims, "My mother would be more liberated by the washing machine than by a right to vote." Throughout the film, lighter satirical moments are often abruptly punctuated by scenes of brutal violence, such as when a

group of villagers, apparently fed up by the young revolutionaries' preaching, assault Jugoslava and her friends. The sustained attack sees Jugoslava particularly targeted, with two villagers dragging her off to the side and ripping off her clothes. This is where the scene suddenly ends, with a strong implication of sexual assault. That assault appears to foreshadow the film's end: the four youths' failed revolution culminates in all their guerilla military "training" throughout the film now being directed at Jugoslava's body. Amid increasing disillusionment with their revolutionary cause, and growing tensions between Jugoslava and her male companions, Jugoslava leaves the group and returns home. The three men, however, show up at her house, take her to a field, tear off her clothes, shoot her, and burn her body. The only apparent outcome of their revolutionary cause seems to be a near ritualistic sacrifice of the woman, both because of her perceived betrayal of the cause and also because, yet again, accumulated social frustrations are ultimately most dramatically taken out on a woman's body. *Early Works*, as a powerful indictment of Yugoslavia's "half-way revolution," offers an illuminating study of the (failed) revolution's gender politics by exposing the double bind that ostensibly propagates equality among the sexes while upholding the primacy of patriarchy. Jugoslava's death at the end of the film therefore pointedly embodies the words she speaks earlier in the film: no socialist revolution can succeed if patriarchy itself is not relinquished.

It should be noted that throughout Žilnik's oeuvre, his keen interest in women's social agency (or lack thereof) is most frequently focused on working-class and poor women, from the aforementioned *Little Pioneers* and *Early Works* to his documentary *The Women Are Coming* (1972), which follows a group of women *Gastarbeiter* working in Germany who are traveling home to their families in Yugoslavia for their vacation. Other important examples include *Vera and Eržika* (1981), a TV movie about two longtime textile factory workers (one of the most common professions for working-class women in Yugoslavia), and the TV series *Hot Paychecks* (1987), which focuses on, among other things, the everyday life of cleaning ladies. Another significant instance of the director's interest in working-class communities is his TV movie *Brooklyn – Gusinje* (1988), which follows the experience of the young waitress Ivana, who is a newcomer to a small town on the Yugoslav-Albanian border. Ivana becomes close to a young man, Škeljzen, who is originally from the area but now lives in Brooklyn in the United States. Like many of Žilnik's works, the film deals with economic migration, both domestic (Ivana leaves her tailoring job in Prizren for a higher paying job as a waitress in Gusinje) and international (many locals of Gusinje, like Škeljzen, seek to move abroad in search of better opportunities). As a free-spirited and somewhat naive young woman, Ivana often needs to be schooled in local traditions, but at the same time her naivete does not get in the way of a pointed critique of patriarchy—for instance, in a scene in which she visits an Albanian household, that of some of Škeljzen's relatives, and asks her male host what women in their family do. Upon

hearing a long list of women's "obligations" comprising housework and child-rearing, Ivana responds, "What do you men do, then?" Ivana and her friend and fellow waitress Goca are headstrong and independent young women who increasingly realize that they do not fit well in conservative patriarchal environments. When Goca has second thoughts about marrying a local man, the two women flee her wedding and are helped by a kind stranger—a deaf man who utters the film's most overtly feminist message: "Women need to have the same rights that men have, so that men aren't the only ones privileged." A frequent backdrop to Žilnik's treatment of gender politics is a more general working-class milieu, fraught interethnic borderlands, and transnational movements of people, particularly for economic reasons.

When it comes to queer topics and non-heteronormative approaches to gender and sexuality, Žilnik's film *Marble Ass* (1995), about trans sex workers living in the midst, but also on the margins, of Serbia's nationalist warmongering fervor of the 1990s, offers an extremely provocative treatment of the politics of gender and sexuality, here specifically articulated in relation to the imagined heteronormative "health" of the collective ethnonational(ist) body as such. As I have argued elsewhere, *Marble Ass* provides a poignant oppositional gaze and a subversive statement about "the way in which some bodies are too inappropriate to be interpellated into an ethno-nationalist discourse: two transvestite prostitutes that exist on the margins of society are literally too queer, their lives and uses of both time and place too far removed from convention to be hailed into a collective ethno-national subjectivity constituted as 'healthy' through the violence it performs."[01] The film is a unique instance of regional queer and trans cinema, as it was made in close collaboration with its trans protagonists, Merlinka[02] and Sanela, who are both nonprofessional actors playing a version of themselves in the film. Like most of Žilnik's other nondocumentary work, *Marble Ass* plays more like a docudrama than a straightforward narrative film, and this adds to its provocative edge, where fact and fiction are never firmly set apart.

The film is unique because it is, still today, perhaps the only regional (post-Yugoslavia) film that is not merely "queer themed," where such films typically articulate the "plight" of local LGBTQ populations through the lens of heterosexual, cisgender filmmakers and actors, as is the case with *Fine Dead Girls* (2002) and *Go West* (2005), for instance. *Marble Ass* instead provides an unrelentingly consistent vision of what queer theorist Jack Halberstam has, in a different context, theorized as a queer time and place.[03] The film does so by putting front and center "the otherwise marginalized vision of queer temporality and spatiality"[04] and by refusing to channel the trans protagonists' experiences through anything other than this lens of queer temporality and spatiality. Moreover, "the film insists that queer bodies cannot be fully interpellated into an ideology of normative, violent ethno-national body, and thus the two trans-

01 Dijana Jelača, *Dislocated Screen Memory: Narrating Trauma in Post-Yugoslav Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 116.

02 EDITORS' NOTE: Grammatically, Merlinka is the female form of Merlin. However, this form is uncommon in Serbo-Croatian and is mostly used to refer to Marilyn Monroe. The protagonist of the film *Marble Ass* is referred to both as Merlin and Merlinka.

03 J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: NYU Press, 2005).

04 Jelača, *Dislocated Screen Memory*, 118.

vestite protagonists exist in their own seemingly parallel universe, albeit one that is nevertheless constituted by its proximity to the normative and violent nationalism that envelops the wartime reality around them."[05] Here, the politics of embodied experience again blurs fact and fiction, since the trans protagonists in the film are not cis actors playing trans characters but rather are individuals whose experiences outside the boundaries of the film very much mirror what goes on in the film. This shared reality was tragically brought further into focus in 2003, when one of the protagonists, Vjeran Miladinović Merlinka, was brutally murdered.[06]

I will conclude this discussion of Žilnik's ongoing and always keenly engaged interest in the political dimension of gender by turning to the documentary *One Woman – One Century* (2011), in which the director's subject is Dragica Vitolović Srzentić (FIG. 4), a woman who, at the time of the documentary's making, was nearly one hundred years old. Vitolović Srzentić was a socialist revolutionary in the 1930s

FIGURE 4: Dragica Vitolović Srzentić with her female squad during the Second World War. *One Woman – One Century* (film still), 2011.

and, among other things, a contributor to the progressive women's magazine *Žena danas* (Woman today, 1936). She also participated in the revolutionary anti-fascist fights of the Second World War, known as the People's Liberation Struggle, or NOB, and, after the war, became the person who delivered President Josip Broz Tito's "historic no" to Joseph Stalin in 1948, marking the (in)famous moment the two leaders parted ways, triggering Yugoslavia's emancipation from USSR and the development of its own unique form of market socialism. As Vitolović Srzentić recounts her century-long story in the documentary, the footage of her is frequently intercut with block letters that slowly spell out the names of prominent men who were her contemporaries, close friends, and/or collaborators: from her family members—her brother Viktor Vitolović and husband Vojo Srzentić—to well-known figures of Yugoslav socialism such as Otokar Keršovani, Miroslav Krleža, Veselin Masleša, Moše Pijade, Jaša Prodanović, Bora Prodanović, and Tito himself. All these are male names firmly inscribed in Yugoslavia's history, while Vitolović Srzentić's has remained fairly obscure. Through Žilnik's documentary, an intervention is therefore staged: it is not that these male names interrupt Vitolović Srzentić's story; on the contrary, it is her story that interrupts the largely male-dominated history of Socialist Yugoslavia and the revolutionary anti-fascist struggle of the Second World War, as a woman's name and lived experience is inserted into it. *One Woman – One Century* illustrates how attention to the gendered dynamics of historical events, large and small, has permeated the entirety of Žilnik's rich and diverse filmmaking career.

Reappropriating Marx's famous pronouncement that "the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it,"[07] the film scholar Pavle Levi posits that "Žilnik is, essentially, a version of Karl Marx's *11th Thesis on Feuerbach*, set in the realm of film practice: *the filmmakers have only* reproduced (represented) *the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to* produce *it*."[08] This conclusion is based on Levi's following poignant assertion:

> [Žilnik is] a firm believer that the camera's duty is not simply to depict existing reality, but rather to strive to generate within it that which is to be depicted; to induce a variety of desired as well as unexpected movements, torsions, and ruptures in the social fabric (filming as a negation of the status quo), and to inspire the forging of some novel, often improvised and only temporary, communal bonds among the people who are being filmed (emancipation catalyzed by image-making).[09]

With respect to any theme and social issue they tackle, gender and sexuality included, Želimir Žilnik's films are never calculated political pronouncements but rather collaborative encounters and frequently spontaneous performances of new social possibilities that illuminate something heretofore invisible about existing conditions. ★

05 Jelača, *Dislocated Screen Memory*, 118–19.

06 Merlinka was Žilnik's long-term collaborator, and before *Marble Ass* appeared in *Good Morning Belgrade* (1985) and *Pretty Women Walking through the City* (1986).

07 Karl Marx, quoted in Pavle Levi, *Jolted Images: Unbound Analytic* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 87.

08 Levi, *Jolted Images*, 87. Emphasis in the original.

09 Levi, *Jolted Images*, 87.

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Marble Ass

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia • 1995 • 87 min. • Betacam to 35 mm • color

Merlin has been helping to pacify the Balkans by turning tricks with countless Serbian men. She acts as a lightning rod that shelters Belgrade—calming violent nighthawks, swanky big spenders, miserable loners, and horny young studs, and taking on the charge that would otherwise befall little girls, unprotected mothers, and helpless old women. Combined with guns, this unbridled energy would otherwise eventually lead to bloodshed. Merlin cools the boiling blood of violent man and enriches it with love. Džoni (Johnny) returns from war and arrives home in Belgrade. His motives are apparently similar to Merlin's—he also wants to cool boiling blood, but he does it by letting it out through holes in the human body, which he makes with bullets and knives. *Marble Ass* is a treatise on the different methods of resolving conflicts, as resorted to by Merlin and Džoni.

The semi-fictional character of Merlin is played by actor Vjeran Miladinović, who also appears in a few of Žilnik's previous movies, and with whom a chance encounter prompted the making of this film. She was the one who introduced Žilnik to Belgrade's trans bars and hangouts, where Žilnik realized that, in the midst of the war, this felt like the most normal and levelheaded community. The movie was funded by the earnings of *Tito among the Serbs for the Second Time* (1994). It was very successful, receiving the Teddy Award at the 1995 Berlin International Film Festival and shown in numerous LGBT film festivals around the world. ●

Marble Ass (poster), 1995.
DESIGNED BY MIODRAG MILOŠEVIĆ.

LEFT
Marble Ass (on-set photos), 1995.
PHOTOS BY MIODRAG MILOŠEVIĆ.
TOP Vjeran Miladinović and Nenad Racković.
BOTTOM Vjeran Miladinović and Lidija Stevanović.

Black Film shows the self-justifying and self-serving position of humanistic compassion, characteristic of left-wing liberals, to be fundamentally misleading.

—Branislav Dimitrijević, "Concrete Analysis of Concrete Situations: Marxist Education According to Želimir Žilnik," *Afterall*, Autumn/Winter 2010, 55.

A director who also does screenplay—and I'm such a case—experiences his film as a kind of giving birth. And when giving birth, even when bad sides are visible, they try to hide them—but man can't run away from himself. I started making films a long time ago, and I realized that it is the only art in which life enters directly, in pieces. So everything I have done has never attempted to follow mainstream aesthetics; for me it was incidental. Rather, I have always tried to put on film what I found important in my life at the moment when the film was made. Everything I have done, either documentary or feature, was something of a happening when it was being made. That is the thing I find challenging, and not the mere imitation of reality through "the realization of the text."

—Želimir Žilnik, interview (untitled), *Reporter*, August 1986.

Žilnik's cinema [...] resides in the process, the series of relations, which constitute the making of a film and which are here conceived as already a direct and worthy intervention into the social sphere. In this type of cinema, the act of filming is at least as important as the (finished) film. Deprived of the aura of a privileged creative activity, art/film practice thus becomes a situation of common labor. In a sense, Žilnik's films may be thought of as chronicles left by a group of workers—the director, the cast, the crew—of their attempted exercises in grassroots social and cultural productivity. They are "films-as-documents" of their own production, which is conceived as first and foremost an end unto itself: a dereified collective engagement in "sensuous human activity."

In Žilnik's case (even more so than in the case of other New Film authors, [Dušan] Makavejev included), "cinema-as-praxis" decidedly casts filmmaking as a mode of play. Each new project functions as yet another installment of an experimental social game. As issue is introduced, a situation is established, and the process of filming is set in motion. The making of a film functions simultaneously as 1) an incentive to resolve issues at hand; 2) an exercise in giving birth to a new subcultural cell/formation; and 3) a reflection on what, if anything, will have been accomplished in or through the production process. Thus, even if by the time the filming has come to an end the issues that are being dealt with have not yet been successfully settled, the making of the film will still have constituted a worthy exercise in social activism.

—Pavle Levi, in Pavle Levi and Želimir Žilnik, "Europe's Internal Exiles: Sound, Image, and Performance of Identity in Želimir Žilnik's Films," in *Ethnic Europe: Mobility, Identity, and Conflict in Globalized World*, ed. Roland Hsu (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 117.

A Newsreel on Village Youth, in Winter (film stills), 1967

ANA JANEVSKI

The Dancing Paradox: On Movement, Dance, and Bodies in Želimir Žilnik's Films

The camera pans up from the bottom right of the frame, capturing the faces and poses of a cross-generational crowd, either leaning against the wall or forming a front row. While most of them are confronting the camera, smiling or being serious, some of the participants direct their gaze off-frame, slightly balancing their bodies. The music in the background, an experimental rock tune, reveals that the scene takes place in a dance hall. The camera zooms in on the frontman of the band, who sings, "Hey Jelo Jeleno / don't tread the mown hay" (*Oj Jelo Jelena / ne gazi seno košeno*). Then the camera focuses on a group of young people dancing, surrounded by a crowd. Their bodies move and contort frenetically to the rhythm of the music. If we were to isolate this scene, it would show an average group of young people dancing to rock music sometime during the 1960s. Once again, the camera goes back to the singer and then back to the dance floor, zooming in on the legs of the dancers, twisting and bending. Suddenly, an imperceptible moment—the rock theme gradually shifts into a folk tune and the contemporary choreography turns into a popular folk dance: *kolo*.[01]

This is one of the scenes of Želimir Žilnik's early film *A Newsreel on Village Youth, in Winter* (1967). Filmed in villages near Novi Sad, the film focuses on the leisure time of young people in the countryside, or, as the opening title suggests: "Cultural and entertainment life in Vojvodina." The film reveals some of Žilnik's best-known innovations and experimentations, starting with its "fictional documentarism or documentarist fictionalism,"[02] which involves working with nonprofessional actors, the direct relation of the protagonists to the camera-eye, and a lack of distinction between the "acted" and the "spontaneous." The protagonists featured in Žilnik's films are not only amateur actors but also outcasts—invisible, suppressed, and under- and misrepresented members of society, or, as the title of this book and the exhibition that preceded it eloquently puts it, "shadow citizens." Žilnik shows them without prejudice or judgment. As noted in a review of *A Newsreel on Village Youth, in Winter* at the time:

> He approaches his subjects in an open manner, without preconceived conclusions, and despite its authentic creepiness, the film manages to surprise us with the fact that we were hitherto not aware that nearby there was such an oasis of despair and spiritual misery where young men from a wealthy part of the country spend their free time smashing beer bottles with their hard heads.[03]

Postwar Yugoslavia drew upon emancipatory socialism, an ideology in which the future is ostensibly in the hands of the young generation. Since the very beginning of his career, Žilnik has pointed to the contradictions and omissions of the Yugoslav socialist system and its official discourse. His disclosing of futile, prosaic, and unsophisticated ways of spending leisure time can thus be read as an almost subversive act.[04]

01
Kolo ("circle" or "wheel") is a South Slavic traditional dance performed among groups of people who hold each other's hands, ideally in a circle (hence the name).

02
Branislav Dimitrijević, "Behind Scepticism Lies the Fire of a Revolutionary!," ZilnikZelimir.net, n.d., https://www.zilnikzelimir.net/essay/behind-scepticism-lies-fire-revolutionary-1.

03
Bogdan Tirnanić, "Njihov prvi film (ili šta su pokazali debitanti 14. festivala)," *Filmnovosti*, March 29, 1967. All translations from Serbo-Croatian are the author's, unless otherwise noted.

04
The film was selected for the 14th Debutant

I would like to focus on some aspects of Žilnik's films that so far haven't been discussed in the many evaluations of his oeuvre, namely his approaches and analyses of movement, speech, music, and the composition of bodies in relation to the contradictory, complex, and multifaceted aspects of the Yugoslav socialist system and its social dynamics.

Žilnik is interested in youth culture and in the generational change that happened in the 1960s, when the younger generation without direct experience of anti-fascist struggle came onto the scene. Hence in *A Newsreel on Village Youth, in Winter,* the older generation complains that today there is no discipline and young people do whatever they want. It was also a time when the influence of popular genres from the West (particularly American and Western European popular music) was strongly linked to the country's opening to the West and the ensuing effect on established local cultural production. The rock tune mentioned at the start of this essay is a distinctive local variation of the Western pop music idiom. The intertwining and overlapping of local legacy and foreign influence is a particularly interesting example of a hybrid creation poignant with symbolism. The bodies dancing to a rock tune are an affirmation of social transformation, a point of convergence of modernization within a traditional form of socialization. The socialist cultural policy insisted on the modernization of mass culture, while socialist folklore was an ideological category used by the authorities to showcase modernization, acting as a deceptive facade portraying a happy and prosperous rural life, which also helped to disguise the poor reality of peasant life. Furthermore, socialist folklore was seen as "a primary tool employed in the building process of a supranational identity."[05]

Žilnik is not focused on the repertoire of amateur ensembles or established singers; instead, he turns toward the people and their stories that are usually forgotten and marginalized. In *A Newsreel on Village Youth, in Winter,* he observes how these two moments, rock and folklore, are embodied in everyday life and in vernacular culture. The double nature of the dancing youth in Vojvodina doesn't stand so much for a duality or clash of the urban and the rural as much as for the parallel coexistence of the two, where one doesn't exclude the other, both in ordinary life as well as in politics and pop cultural activities in Yugoslavia.

Miroslav Krleža, a Croatian writer and prominent intellectual figure in Socialist Yugoslavia, claimed, while reflecting on the modernization of Yugoslavia in 1979, that Josip Broz Tito's socialism had contributed to the cultural prosperity and development of the Yugoslav nation over the previous thirty years more than the last 150 years combined. "Hence," he added, "this rhythm of cultural development is so far incomparable." However, he also believed that Yugoslavia wouldn't be able to cross into the third millennium without emancipating itself from nationalist myths: "The Party has been overcome by the peasant uprising, and it succeeded in orienting the masses, but unfortunately its symbol is *kozaračko kolo,* when instead we should be moving forward. *Kozaračko kolo* should be left to history."[06]

Film Festival in Belgrade in 1967. It was not shown in the official competition but as part of the informative section, as the jury was not able to accept "the aspect of our life we were not familiar with, while Žilnik in his film surprised us with its complexity and defeat[s] us with its own existence." Tirnanić, "Njihov prvi film."

05
Ana Hofman, "Questioning Socialist Folklorization: The Beltinci Folklore Festival in the Slovenian Borderland of Prekmurje," in *Audiovisual Media and Identity Issues in Southeastern Europe*, ed. Eckehard Pistrick, Nicola Scaldaferri, and Gretel Schworer (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), 238.

A Newsreel on Village Youth, in Winter (film still), 1967

Žilnik, by contrast, doesn't seem to hold a stance as assertive as Krleža's. He instead merely observes the symptoms of the impotence of the party ideology. The dancing youth in *A Newsreel on Village Youth, in Winter* pose a challenge to the ideological task of producing a fixed, static concept and interpretation of socialist culture. The young men and women embodying both rock and *kolo* represent the paradox present not only in socialist cultural policy but more generally in socialist society at large. This paradox recurs as an important feature throughout Žilnik's ouevre. In that regard, the art historian Branislav Dimitrijević writes in his analysis of Žilnik's work:

> Among its various meanings, a paradox can be defined as an apparently true statement, or group of statements, that leads to a contradiction or a situation which defies intuition; or it can be an apparent contradiction that actually expresses a non-dual truth. In the notion of the paradox there is an effective means to deconstruct not only any static argument, but also an exercise in which there is no simple refutation of one of the relevant points of view, but a synthesis or combination of the opposing assertions.[07]

Paradox is also present in Žilnik's relation to dominant ideology. After being expelled from the Party for his anarcho-liberal views, Žilnik continued to deal with the complexity of Marxism in a socialist Yugoslavia, himself remaining a leftist.[08] His intention was not to critique socialist reality but to bring a critical enrichment to the

06
Miroslav Krleža, quoted in Damir Pilić, "Tito očima Krleže," unpublished manuscript. The *Kozaračko kolo* is a traditional dance (see footnote 01).

07
Dimitrijević, "Behind Scepticism Lies the Fire of a Revolutionary!"

08
"The tragedy of the Communist Union is that the most important party functions are occupied by people with evident family complexes who are trying to be bigger Catholics than the Pope," pronounced Žilnik when expelled from the Communist Party after a dispute over the Neoplanta Film production house. Quoted in Boris Buden, *Uvod u prošlost*, ed. Kuda.org (Novi Sad: New Media Center_kuda.org, 2013), 88, https://kuda.org/sites/default/files/Uvod%20u%20proslost_web.pdf.

social discourse.[09] As an acute observer as he is, Žilnik noticed that motion, body dynamics, and pop culture contained this criticality.

In conceiving of an "anthropology of the body" to begin unpacking Žilnik's approach to the human form and its movement, Michel Foucault's notion of "biopower" provides a useful tool. Biopower focuses on the body as the site of subjugation, highlighting how individuals are implicated in their own oppression through their participation in daily bodily practices and habits. Power, according to Foucault, is not imposed from above but rather comes from below. That is, we are all "vehicles of power," because power is "embedded in discourses and norms that are part of the minute practices, habits, and interactions of our everyday lives."[10] Thus, power is everywhere: it is "exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations."[11] Bodily disciplinary techniques, which organize time, space, and daily practices in a society, are institutionalized in schools, prisons, hospitals, and workshops and also individually internalized through self-regulating behavior. In choosing "shadow citizens" as his protagonists, Žilnik focuses on "undisciplined bodies," or the part of the population that is not institutionalized or self-regulating—often dancing, singing, moving, and exercising on their own.

In *Little Pioneers* (1968),[12] Žilnik shows neglected children who are taking care of themselves and are involved in pickpocketing, begging, and other illegal activities. These children are the exact

09
Dimitrijević, "Behind Scepticism Lies the Fire of a Revolutionary!"

10
Jen Pylypa, "Power and Bodily Practice: Applying the Work of Foucault to an Anthropology of the Body," *Arizona Anthropologist* 13 (1998): 23.

11
Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin, 1976), 94.

12
For a description of this film, see Dijana Jelača's essay in this volume (p. 89).

A Newsreel on Village Youth, in Winter (film stills), 1967

Želimir Žilnik and Dušan Ninkov on the set of *Little Pioneers*, 1967. PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

opposite of the happy and carefree image of the "young socialist pioneers" put forward by the Yugoslav government. Žilnik's film has no pedagogical or moralizing attitude to speak of. One of the initial scenes of the film shows a young girl leaning against a dilapidated wall and singing. The lyrics of the song—about a young woman abandoned before her wedding—are in opposition with her young age. The camera follows the children in their daily adventures while their voice-overs narrate situations of pickpocketing, prostitution, and abuse. Žilnik shows them always in motion, mainly in neglected parts of the city, in a group, singing, wailing, screaming, whispering, producing sound with any kind of found object, smoking, throwing stones. Once again we are brought to a dance hall. Instead of music, here we hear one of the young protagonists recounting his adventures while a group of nearby young people contort their bodies in recognizable rock movements. In the midst of these progressive Yugoslav youth engaging in dancing, the "little pioneers" are smoking and talking, dancing and rhythmically banging their hands on the stage. With *Little Pioneers*, Žilnik thus captures another social paradox of the time as well as the contradictory nature of the official cultural policy. Following its screening at the fifteenth Yugoslav Documentary and Short Film Festival, the film once more triggered several film critics to write about Žilnik's talent of shining a light on the most obscure and hidden parts of Yugoslav society. In the filmmaker's own words: "In my films I am dealing with serious social issues, not in a pseudo-engaged way, but rather in a polyvalent manner. I think that a pathos-filled approach to a subject can never be sincere. That's why I consider it important to have a

13
Želimir Žilnik, quoted in "Nova filmska nada," *Filmske novosti*, September 1967.

humorist stance toward life."[13] He cites his admiration of the films of the Czech director Miloš Forman and his apparent "light" motives, which hide a darkness that viewers can either uncover or not, as inspiration for his own approach to filmmaking. This darkness is perhaps a presumptive quality of Žilnik's *Black Film* (1971) and of the idea of "blackness" that accompanied him and his peers from the 1970s onward following accusations that their films portrayed Yugoslav society as black and negative.[14]

For Žilnik, documentary film and culture do not provide a remedy from social misery. He doubts the emancipatory power of culture. Toward the end of *Little Pioneers,* the children begin insulting each other, in a rather vulgar and adult way, while in the background a young boy smashes into a cardboard box, and a girl, who previously recounted her sexualized encounters with older men, dances and moves her body sensually. They are both disconnected from the group and from each other, yet they create a unity. Žilnik doesn't film the vitality or energy of young bodies; rather, he shows them as symptoms of the realities born of the impotence of the socialist ideology, while everyday life continues in all its darkness. Žilnik, who started his film practice in the amateur cine clubs of Novi Sad, describes how a do-it-yourself approach contributed to his ability to tackle such subversive subjects in his work: "Very early on I was forced to use all the methods of movement of amateur film. This environment of amateur film enabled me to rid myself of administrative labyrinths, which were the only way to acquire money to make a film. It was a form of freedom."[15] Courageous amateurism is prominent in Žilnik's films, both as a concept and as a method, and

Little Pioneers (film still), 1968

14
Žilnik together with other filmmakers, including Dušan Makavejev and Živojin Pavlović, in their films openly criticized the alienation of the socialist man, pointing to class and social contradictions in Socialist Yugoslavia at the time. As a consequence of an ideological campaign led by the cultural-political establishment, these films became known as the Black Wave. The article that introduced the term "Black Wave" was published in the newspaper *Borba* in 1969. A journalist stated that the Black Wave in Yugoslav film presents "a systematic distortion of the present," in which everything is viewed through a monochromatic lens. Its themes are "obscure and present improper visions and images of violence, moral degeneracy, misery, lasciviousness and triviality." Vladimir Jovičić, "'Crni val' u našem filmu," *Borba* Belgrade, August 3, 1969.

15
Želimir Žilnik, quoted in Stevan Vuković, "Notes on Paradigms in Experimental Film in Socialist Yugoslavia," in *This Is All Film! Experimental Film in Yugoslavia, 1951–1991,* ed. Bojana Piškur, Ana Janevski, Jurij Meden, and Stevan Vuković (Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 2010), 53.

LEFT TO RIGHT Miodrag Milošević, Branimir Stojanović Trša, and Dragan Kolarov on the set of *The Old School of Capitalism*, 2009. PHOTO BY LEON ŠURBANOVIĆ.

16
What, How & for Whom/WHW, "Želimir Žilnik, Shadow Citizens," ZilnikZelimir.net, 2018, https://www.zilnikzelimir.net/project/zelimir-zilnik-shadow-citizens.

the *Shadow Citizens* exhibition at the Edith-Russ-Haus for Media Art specifically elaborated on "different facets of the potentials of shadow citizens as well as the pressures of the amateur undercurrent in emancipatory politics and artistic production."[16]

In the 1970s, Žilnik left Yugoslavia for Germany, where he realized several films that examine local politics, capturing in particular a moment of rising terrorism and the sociopolitical position of immigrant workers. He soon, however, had to leave Germany due to political opposition, and returned to Yugoslavia where he next made a series of both television and feature films. While in his early films Žilnik deals with the complex interplay of ideology, movement, music, and practice, in his films from the 1980s he detects the early symptoms of the country's growing social conflicts through the figure of the *Gastarbeiter.* The anthropologists Tanja Petrović and Ana Hofman describe the social situation of such guest workers in Yugoslavia and elsewhere in the mid-twentieth century:

> The culturalized image of a *gastarbeiter* as a bizarre, grotesque individual whose cultural taste is characterized by kitsch and eclecticism, who does not fit in the acceptable cultural norms of either the society he or she left nor of the one she or he came to, dominates both popular culture and academic discussion, while the harsh life and hard work of migrants, anxieties resulting from their separation from their children

LEFT AND RIGHT
The First Trimester of Pavle Hromiš (film stills), 1983

and families, and other existential and psychological aspects of their work and life remain only rarely addressed in their complexity.[17]

Young people were, once again, at the center of Žilnik's interest during this era. The TV film *The First Trimester of Pavle Hromiš* (1983) offers a touching and acute overview of the titular teenager, who returns to Yugoslavia while his parents stay in Germany to work, as it follows his integration into the Yugoslav society of the 1980s. The main character is fifteen-year-old Pavle Hromiš, who, after spending the past eleven years with his family in Germany, comes back to Yugoslavia to live with his grandmother in a village near Novi Sad. Žilnik documents another generational conflict, this time between grandmother and grandson, following which Pavle decides to instead live in a boarding house while he attends secondary school.

At school he meets new friends who share a similar experience. Pavle and his friends are lost between two identities. Their confessions to the camera detailing comparisons between the different countries they have lived in are very moving and vivid. One teenager talks about how Austrians don't respect Turks and Yugoslavs, and another boy explains he had to leave a history class in Russia after he refused the idea that the Red Army liberated Yugoslavia. Their stories are also surprising. A girl claims in Dutch that the people in the Netherlands seem more respectful and altruistic than they do in Yugoslavia. Different stories alternate with Pavle's narration about his limited possibilities to succeed in an important profession in Germany and how his most likely path there is that of a manual worker. His voice-over accompanies a scene of him and his classmates exercising and training in some type of martial art. They are all in constant movement, whether their bodies are shown being trained in a gymnastic class at school or running, twisting, curling, or resting on the roof of a building or on a quay along the river. In other moments of the film, Žilnik captures Pavle alone in motion, racing or jumping from one train car to the other, as in an action movie. Once again, the kinetic metaphor stands for unstable social dynamics.

Žilnik likewise remains attentive to the prevalence and role of pop culture, as, for example, when the group is preparing for a school play and a girl sings a folk song. Her mates quickly begin to boo her. Yugoslav culture during the 1980s was, in some respects, progressive and westernized, and thus no longer accepting of any folk elements. This inclination is also present in the conversation Pavle and his friends have around music, covering disco, funk, and heavy metal, among other genres, and bands like Depeche Mode and Simple Minds, while at the same time Žilnik shows the underground music

17 Tanja Petrović and Ana Hofman, "Rethinking Class in Socialist Yugoslavia: Labor, Body, and Moral Economy," in *The Cultural Life of Capitalist Yugoslavia*, ed. Dijana Jelača, Maša Kolanović, and Danijela Lugarić (Baskingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 71.

scene in Novi Sad through scenes of a concert featuring alternative and new wave bands such as Obojeni Program and Boye.

The teenagers of *The First Trimester of Pavle Hromiš* are lost between two socioeconomic systems, a fact made explicit through an animated discussion among the students about the pros and cons of socialism and capitalism. Most of the students still consider socialism to be a more fair and secure system (not everyone's main preoccupation is money); yet if Yugoslav socialism is based on the leadership of its youth, the moment any of the youth start to doubt it, the system shows its first signs of weakness. Eventually, Pavle is attracted by the military life, as it gives him order and security to combat the uncertainty present in his personal life. The final scene of the film features the everyday military ritual of making one's bed and putting on standard-issue clothing; Žilnik soundtracks this new alignment into soldier life with a post-punk tune by Gang of Four. While the body is eventually disciplined, punk and Yugoslav socialism continue to coexist in yet another paradox, until the system's final dissolution.

> *The good life was so elusive*
> *Handouts, they got me down*
> *I had to regain my confidence*
> *So I got into camouflage*
> *The girls they love to see you shoot*
> *I love a man in a uniform*[18] ★

Ana Janevski is currently Curator in the Department of Media and Performance Art at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Most recently, she co-organized the exhibition *Judson Dance Theater: The Work Is Never Done* (with Thomas Lax and Martha Joseph) in 2018–19. She has collaborated with many choreographers and artists, such as Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Jérôme Bel, Yvonne Rainer, Rabih Mroué, Boris Charmatz and Musée de la danse, Simone Forti, Martha Rosler, Ralph Lemon, and Trajal Harrell, among others. From 2007 to 2011, she held the position of Curator at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, where she curated, among many other projects, the large-scale exhibition *As Soon as I Open My Eyes I See a Film*, on the topic of Yugoslav experimental film and art from the 1960s and '70s. She also edited an accompanying book of the same title. In 2010, Janevski cocurated the first extensive show about experimental film in Yugoslavia, *This Is All Film! Experimental Film in Yugoslavia 1951–1991*, at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana.

18
Gang of Four, "I Love a Man in Uniform," *Songs of the Free*, EMI, 1982. Gang of Four played in Zagreb at the Music Biennial in 1981. See "Entertainment: Gang of Four, live in Zagreb, 1981," *Dangerous Minds*, August 20, 2014, https://dangerousminds.net/comments/entertainment_gang_of_four_live_in_zagreb_1981.

Vladimir Sinko in *The First Trimester of Pavle Hromiš* (film still), 1983

The Gastarbeiter Opera

Yugoslavia • 1977 • theater play

The first project Žilnik undertook after his return to Yugoslavia from West Germany was this theater play, staged at the Experimental Scene of the Serbian National Theatre in Novi Sad. It is a singing play in five scenes, following several women from rural areas in Yugoslavia as they travel to West Germany as *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers). They encounter new working conditions, a new culture, and a new language. While the younger women are able to adjust, the older ones experience shock and conflict. After a period of time, the entire group decides to return home to Yugoslavia. At the border, before entering the country, the main protagonist dies.

The play was both a critical and popular success. It was performed over eighty times and won awards at several festivals. However, a few months after the premiere, the West German cultural attaché to Yugoslavia wrote a formal complaint, as he realized after seeing the play that it featured the Nazi anthem "Horst Wessel Lied," and he understood this as an anti-German provocation. He requested the removal of the play from the theater's repertoire. In response, the theater sent an audio recording that made it clear that the song in question was in fact a Bertolt Brecht quote in which the playwright mocks the Nazi song, and the lines are changed to "das Kalb marshiert" (a calf marches). As a result of this dispute, several German newspapers wrote about the play and a report was also broadcast on German television. ●

Jugoslawischer Kulturreport (II): „Gastarbeiter-Oper“ von Zelimir Zilnik in Novi Sad – eine politisch-theatralische Revue

Drei Frauen ziehen aus, das Glück zu finden

Von Heinz Klunker

Kyrillisch nimmt sich der Titel zwar fremd aus, aber ins Lateinische übertragen enthüllt er seine deutsche Herkunft: *Gastarbeiter-Opera*. Er bezeichnet ein theatralisches Ereignis, das in Novi Sad, etwa 80 Kilometer nördlich von Belgrad, nach der Premiere am 24. Januar erst einmal eine Schrecksekunde auslöste. Sie dauerte, genährt vom Vorwurf des Anarchismus gegen den Autor in einer lokalen Kritik, fast 14 Tage. Dann rauschte es im jugoslawischen Blätterwald zwischen Ljubljana und Belgrad, Zagreb und Sarajevo, und das Rauschen verhieß einen künstlerischen, aber auch einen politischen Erfolg. Das kulturelle Klima ist noch wechselhaft, schlägt erst allmählich ins sonnige Tauwetter um; vor einem Jahr jedenfalls wäre dieses Stück kaum schon möglich gewesen.

Die Gastarbeiter-Problematik, ein öffentlich umstrittenes Thema in der Bundesrepublik, zumal in der Rezession, rührt in Jugoslawien an die Existenz von Staat und Gesellschaft. Scham und schlechtes Gewissen belasten eine offene Diskussion, deren Nutzen freilich niemand nachweisen kann. Da ist einerseits das ökonomische Plus, das sich im Unterhalt für Tausende von Familien niederschlägt und dem Staat nebenher noch wertvolle Devisen einbringt; dem steht andererseits der Exodus großer Teile der arbeitsfähigen und -willigen Bevölkerung gegenüber, verbunden mit der Entfremdung von Familie und Heimat, geprägt von der Enttäuschung über einen Staat, der ihnen Arbeitsplatz und Auskommen nicht gewähren kann. Diese moralische Herausforderung an die jugoslawische Gesellschaft hat ihren Ausdruck bereits in Literatur und Film, besonders im kritischen Kurzfilm, gefunden. Die Kehrseite der Gastarbeiter-Medaille konnten wir in Filmen wie *Sonderzüge* oder *Bei der Mahlzeit*, die bei uns im Fernsehen gezeigt wurden, kennenlernen.

Man geht von zwölf Millionen Gastarbeitern in Europa aus, wobei der Begriff, der mit dem Status dieser Bürger zweiter Klasse fortwährend kollidiert, nur noch ironisch gebraucht werden kann. Das tut auch Zelimir Zilnik, Autor und Regisseur der *Gastarbeiter-Oper*, der die ausländischen Arbeiter, seine Landsleute und Türken, Griechen oder Italiener, mit den Goldgräbern vergleicht, die einmal in den Wilden Westen zogen: „Es sind die positiven Helden unserer Zeit. Für einen landlosen Bauern, der von Anatolien aufbricht und in Hamburg ankommt, ist das ein Abenteuer, vergleichbar mit Kolumbus, der nach dem Westen ging, um Indien zu erreichen.“

Zilnik und seinem Komponisten Pedja Vranesevic kam es nicht auf eine Story an, sondern auf Situationen, denen sie Menschen aussetzen, die aus einem ihnen vertrauten Milieu gerissen wurden. Sie haben eine Art Schuldgefühl, wie Kinder vor ihren Eltern, Schüler vor ihren Lehrern; ihnen fehlen die Möglichkeiten, sich sprachlich differenziert auszudrücken, sie sprechen reduziert, in Chiffren. Ihre auf die Häufung von Verben und Substantive eingeschmolzene Prosa schlägt in Pop-Verse um, wenn sie mit Vorgesetzten reden.

Aber da sind wir bereits bei der Struktur des unkonventionellen Stückes. Es beginnt naturalistisch in einer Baracke, einer Art Nachtasyl, das drei Frauen zusammengeführt hat: Eine hat ihren Mann verloren, die andere ist ohne Job und die dritte auf Abenteuer aus. Ihre Gespräche sind bitter, ironisch und von schwarzem Humor getönt. Sie malen sich eine Zukunft aus, angesichts derer die Gegenwart noch unerträglicher wird, und beschließen, ins Ausland zu gehen. Der Schritt in die schillernde Konsumwelt setzt die Frauen unerwarteten Verwandlungen aus. Sie probieren nicht nur neue Kleider, sondern auch neues Verhalten. Dem Schwarzweißfilm des Eingangsbildes folgt nun der Farbfilm mit rührend komischen Wirkungen. Wieder ein Schnitt: Die drei Frauen geraten ins unerbittliche Räderwerk der modernen Industrie, wo Befehl herrscht und Gehorsam — Chaplins *Moderne Zeiten* sind da nicht weit. Unseren Heldinnen gelingt die Anpassung nicht, sie werden von der Arbeit gejagt, streunen herum und überdenken ihre Lage. Als sie auf ein zerstrittenes „Kapitalistenpaar“ treffen, schlagen sie sich auf die Seite der Frau, solidarisieren sie sich gemeinsam gegen den Patriarchen. Der letzte Akt zeigt die Frauen, westlich ummontiert, bei der Heimreise an der Grenze. Eine Vision vom Müll-Europa wird konfrontiert mit pervertierter Folklore, die ihres volkstümlichen Charakters gänzlich entkleidet wurde — leere Euphorie in fremder Sprache. Entfremdet nun auch von der Heimat, endet das bitterböse Stück mit einem Aufschrei, der an Polanskis *Rosemary's Baby* erinnert: Wächst da ein Kind im Bauch oder ein Geschwür? Kein großes Gesangsfinale, kein Happy-End.

Dieser Stoff geht ganz in theatralischen Formen auf, am roten Faden einer eingängigen Musik-Collage aufgereiht — das dokumentarische Theater der Eingangsszene schlägt um in zeremonielles Theater bei der Westankunft, die Rockshow der Maschinenwelt wird abgelöst vom Melodrama im allgemeinen Katzenjammer, und endlich wird jene auf den Schlager gekommene Folklore parodiert. Die Musik, so vergnüglich sie immer sein mag, schärft die Inhalte, kommentiert die Haltungen und Situationen. Das Stück vermittelt über Emotionen und Aggressionen soziale und ökonomische Einsichten, die beim Publikum offensichtlich ankommen.

Zelimir Zilnik, der selbst in Novi Sad lebt, dem Mittelpunkt der buntgemischten Vojvodina, hat sein Engagement für die Unterdrückten und Aufbegehrenden, wie es bereits in Kurzfilmen (etwa *Studentenstreik*, *Der schwarze Film* oder *Aufstand in Jasak* — alle mit Preisen bedacht) und in seinem mit dem Berliner Goldenen Bären ausgezeichneten Spielfilm *Frühe Werke* zum Ausdruck drängte, nun auf die Bühne übertragen. Hinter Polemik und Satire, Parodie und Ironie erkennt man eine entschiedene Parteinahme für die Frauen, die nicht nur als Arbeitskräfte, sondern auch als Frauen ausgebeutet werden. Sie haben ein menschliches Angesicht und reagieren irritierend menschlich; die Männer, sie sind die Bosse, dürfen nur Symbole sein, Plakate der Herrschaft. In diesem Sinne ist Zilniks *Gastarbeiter-Oper* fast ein feministisches Stück, und in diesem Sinne ist wohl auch der provinzielle Anarchismus-Verdacht gemeint. Es wäre interessant, die Produktion aus Novi Sad als Gastspiel dort zu sehen, wo die Gastarbeiter ihre zugleich gewünschte und bloß geduldete Gastrolle spielen — in der Bundesrepublik etwa.

PARTEINAHME FÜR FRAUEN: Szene aus der „Gastarbeiter-Oper“ in Novi Sad; links: Regisseur Zilnik

Fotos: Zoltan Apro

IN THE PRESS
An article on *Gastarbeiter Opera*, in the newspaper *Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt*, March 6, 1977.

I made my first film via the “risk it method.” I assembled the entire crew with people who were willing to work without being paid upfront. Films considered as a “safe” investment had to have a finished script and a plan of shooting to get into actual production and budget would be allocated. I didn’t have a budget, I also didn’t and couldn’t have a detailed script, so I had decided to play it by ear.

—Želimir Žilnik, in conversation with Dubravka Sekulić, Gal Kirn, and Žiga Testen, in *Surfing the Black: Yugoslav Black Wave Cinema and Its Transgressive Moments,* ed. Gal Kirn, Dubravka Sekulić, and Žiga Testen (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Academie, 2012), 67.

Žilnik did not limit his approach to a certain humanistic empathy toward the underprivileged but explored the unpredictability of the political and the social role of this group. There is no sentimentalism in his approach yet there is an understanding for a certain *creativity-from-below* (as opposed from *modernisation-from-above* which was the tendency of the cultural policy) which Žilnik observes and later incorporates in his films, especially in those made for TV in the 1980s.

—Branislav Dimitrijević, “Behind Scepticism Lies the Fire of a Revolutionary!,” in *For an Idea – Against the Status Quo: Analysis and Systematization of Želimir Žilnik’s Artistic Practice* (Novi Sad: New Media Center_kuda.org, Playground produkcija, 2009), 144–45.

Stanley Akumbe (left) and unnamed castmate on the set of *Logbook_Serbistan* (on-set photo), 2014. PHOTO BY ORFEAS SKUTELIS.

GREG DE CUIR JR

Black Soil

Prescript

Carbon has often been referred to as the king of the elements. It is a nonmetallic element, part of group 14 of the periodic table, atomic number 6, with a melting point of 3,550°C (6,420°F) and a boiling point of 4,827°C (8,721°F). In 1961, the isotope carbon-12 was selected to replace oxygen as the standard relative against which the atomic weights of all the other elements are measured. Like any good leader should, carbon stands as an instructive model to its peers, ruling by a right ascribed to it collectively in a manner that uplifts the community it both serves and is a part of.

Carbon is king because it forms more compounds than all the other elements combined. Furthermore, it is the second most abundant element in the human body by mass (about 18.5 percent), after oxygen. Indeed, carbon is one of the few elements known since antiquity. In the nineteenth century, most of the known carbon compounds were considered to have originated in living organisms. However, elemental carbon exists in several forms, each of which has its own physical characteristics and its own particular applications.

There is about 60 percent carbon in the substance humus. Humus is nonliving, finely divided organic matter in soil, derived from microbial decomposition of plant and animal substances. Though a nonliving substance, it grants life. As it decomposes, its components transform into forms usable by plants. As such, it is valued by farmers and gardeners. Humus ranges in color from brown to black. One might venture the hypothesis that the darker the color, the more nutritious and valuable the humus, but this would be a position that needs further scientific substantiation.[01]

Chernozem contains a high percentage of humus, anywhere from 4 to 16 percent, which makes chernozem a very fertile grassland soil that can produce high agricultural yields. In the nineteenth century, legends of the fabled fertility of chernozem and the ease of cultivating it were widespread. It was described as a peculiar soil, and today it still remains something of a wonder, even if we can elaborate its qualities and values with scientific facts.

There are only two chernozem belts in the world, and one of them is the Eurasian Steppe. Research into this storied natural substance began during a formative stage of soil science, with most attributing the identification and classification of chernozem to the Russian geologist and geographer Vasily Dokuchaev in 1883. Dokuchaev considered soil to be "a natural body having its own genesis and its own history of development, a body with complex and multiform processes taking place within it."[02] Indeed, Dokuchaev is commonly regarded as the father of soil science, in no small part due to his visionary and anthropomorphizing conception of soil. But there was another scientist who preceded Dokuchaev and whose thesis laid the foundation for these subsequent findings.

01 Data on carbon and humus derived from www.britannica.com.

02 N.A. Krasilnikov, "Soil Microorganisms and Higher Plants," 1958, Soil & Health Library, https://soilandhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/01aglibrary/010112.krasilnikov.pdf.

The Austrian subject Franz Josef Ruprecht was invited to Russia in the early nineteenth century and offered a position as a botanical curator. The Eurasian Steppe soon captured his attention, and with it the fantastic soil that is characteristic of it. In 1866, Ruprecht wrote an influential article titled "Geo-Botanical Researches into the Chernozem." It is significant for its pioneering measures, as well as for introducing the term "geo-botanical." The title of this article also evidences the fact that the term "chernozem" was already in circulation, perhaps even long before Ruprecht mobilized it. It would have been commonly spoken by peasants, farmers, and any others who worked the land and were shaped by intimate proximity to it—for the Russian compound "chernozem" simply means "black soil," or what we might more metaphorically and inductively call "black earth."

The opening shot of *Logbook_Serbistan* (2015) depicts rushing floodwaters carrying away sediment and other detritus. The setting is the Southeast European floods of 2014, caused by the heaviest recorded rains in the region in 120 years. In particular, the setting is the Republic of Serbia, with two men who seem to be travelers standing over the rushing waters and watching in amazement.

The Non-Aligned Movement was formally established in 1961 in Belgrade, then part of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The states that belonged to this movement were not aligned on a geopolitical scale with either of the two dominant powers that then existed: the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. One might call the Non-Aligned Movement a de facto conference linking together the Global South, and therefore consolidating a majority of peoples of color in the world. African countries were founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement, and all except two African nations are currently members. President Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia had always felt a certain affinity to Africa. As a bona fide political renegade, rarely was Tito invited on official state visits to either the US or the USSR. However, he was invited to numerous African nations, traveled extensively on the continent, and always had the red carpet rolled out for him. Among the original principles of the Non-Aligned Movement were mutual respect, equality, and peaceful coexistence. Though the principles remain the same today, they are not always put into practice, particularly in the territory of former Yugoslavia, not to mention the rest of Europe.

The artist Želimir Žilnik was also forged in the early 1960s, coming of age at a moment when Yugoslavia was ascending. In practical terms, this meant he was afforded the leisure to study law while also working as the chief organizer of the cultural center Youth Tribune in his hometown of Novi Sad. And while he was engaged in these parallel activities, he showed an interest in the art of cinema, got involved in Kino Klub Novi Sad, and began making nonprofessional, nonconformist short films, which soon led to an opportunity to make professional films. One of the added bonuses of the Non-Aligned Movement was a freer flow of international citizens to and from Socialist Yugoslavia, which brought with it a freer flow of ideas and cultures. It was not uncommon for Žilnik to rub shoulders with students from all over Africa and other Non-Aligned countries as well. Therefore, his disposition was seeded by political ideals that valued the "other," that in fact thrived on close contact and cross-cultural networks of support and exchange. This cultural value was also at the core of Socialist Yugoslav identity, just as it was central to the earlier values of the region that predated the two twentieth-century Yugoslavias, spanning the nineteenth century and stretching back even further, through the Hapsburg and Ottoman Empires all the way to the sixth century, when various Slavic tribes migrated onto the Pannonian Plain, which was a province of the Roman Empire at the time of the birth of Christ and named after Pan, the god of nature.

Logbook_Serbistan
(film still), 2015

The two men standing on the bridge over troubled waters in *Logbook_Serbistan* are two African migrants trying to come to terms with what

the floods mean for the prospects of living in Serbia, both for them and the citizens of the state. This visual symbolism might be read as insensitive, with migrant flows into Europe often cruelly defined as waves or swarms or surges—all reminiscent of biblical-scale calamities. But Žilnik upends this punitive symbolism and uses it instead as a pathway to something that has concerned him throughout his career: collective labor. Even more specifically, cross-cultural transnational labor. The next section in the film is an extended wordless sequence that depicts the work done to salvage homes ruined in the floods and to clear out debris so that reconstruction can begin. One of the African men on the bridge, Lee, who becomes one of the protagonists we follow closely throughout the film, can be seen participating in the labor along with his coworkers, among them Serbians and migrants from Africa and the Middle East.

We might pause here on this early sequence and savor the vision it offers. It evokes the golden age of the Non-Aligned Movement, also the heyday of the mythologizing of collective labor. We also see a snapshot of how a modern Europe can and perhaps must work: various races, ethnicities, nations, and faiths bonding together to build a new and more humane society, a better society built on the mutual affordances that were agreed to more than half a century earlier in Belgrade when non-alignment as political practice was first consolidated. This sequence might be one of the more utopic that Žilnik has ever created. But like many of the sequences in his oeuvre, it is handled with not a trace of exaggeration, either aesthetic or emotional. The sequence instead becomes a matter of fact, of rational conclusion. This is how the world should work—maybe even this is how the world did work at one point. Certainly, this is how Žilnik's world worked—for a brief spell. His cinema operates this way because he carries the pieces of his former world and all that it stood for within him. That world may have failed him on more than one occasion, but he is an artist who never lost his faith. Perhaps this is in fact what makes him an artist in the first place.

There has been no shortage of works of art, including films and videos, dealing with the migrant situation in Europe in the last five years. Some of these works win awards and other forms of cultural capital for their makers. Some of them have large budgets and attractive effects that call attention either to the brilliance of the creator or the sturdiness of their engaged stance. Few, however, can make a film like *Logbook_Serbistan*, in which migrants as points of focus are treated as participants in the transgression of the border between fiction and documentary, which is also a transgression of hegemonic principles, and a transgression of the myth of the single genius auteur. The generosity that characterizes Žilnik's work is evident in the way he portrays both the travelers passing through the Balkan corridor and those they encounter along the way. Žilnik's relation to his subjects, and his relation to the ethical trappings of genre, can be seen in the closing sequence of the film, in which we also see the benevolent hand of the director.

Logbook_Serbistan (poster), 2015. DESIGNED BY NIKOLA BERBAKOV.

Plenty of ink has been spilled on the ethics of documentary intersecting with its interventionist capacities. The debate as to whether directors should step from behind the camera to insert themselves into the lives of their subjects—usually while at a crossroads, when good deeds are in short supply, and thus fracturing the seamless representation that is being constructed—is still relevant and unresolved. For Žilnik, as the old saying goes, this is where the rubber meets the road. He has always intervened. This is a moral position that is a luxury to be debated by those who do not put themselves on the frontlines, for whom the work is of more importance than the human material used. Žilnik approaches from the opposite direction. Near the conclusion of *Logbook_Serbistan*, when Lee and his traveling partner, Stanley, have come close to the Hungarian border—that is, the border of the European Union, which is the final destination for most—they come across a group of Middle Eastern migrants taking shelter in an abandoned building. They have been walking the treacherous Balkan route for days, and one of them has injured feet that will carry him no further. It is a difficult sight and also the climax of the film in some ways. After the two protagonists offer a few words of encouragement, a member of the production crew reaches into the frame to pass over an ointment to help heal the injured traveler's feet. This minor gesture has epic proportions for the politics of the film and its final effect, its embedded argument. It is a moment that comes with very little fanfare, not played for dramatic or reflexive effect. But it is one of the more consequential gestures in contemporary European cinema. This is the hand that Žilnik should be remembered by. Maybe it is even his own.

The film ends on an image of Stanley walking off into the distance, toward the Hungarian border and into an unknown future in the European Union. The television film *Black and White* (1990) opens with the inverse: a man from Africa, Reuben, is hitchhiking on a freeway on his way into Serbia, in particular to Novi Sad, where he was once a student and where he left behind a girlfriend. A direct result of the Non-Aligned Movement was that a large number of students from the Global South moved to Yugoslavia to study. Reuben is one example of such a student, and here Žilnik is interested in investigating how he is reintegrated into a society that he once knew but that in the final years of the 1980s, when he was last in Serbia, was transitioning into something else.

Black and White includes a scene where Reuben visits a Roma family and engages in a conversation about their background. They mention they have roots in Egypt and that President Gamal Abdel Nasser once asked President Tito if all Egyptians could be returned to their land of origin. Tito's response was no, because, as the family in the film states, the Roma are his finest and best people. Whether the anecdote is true, and whether Tito actualized this level of respect, is questionable. But the story is telling, as exaggeration often can be. There is a legend, a myth, a tradition of cross-cultural tolerance that was upheld in Yugoslavia, particularly the region Novi Sad is

located within. People felt this ideology, relied on it, and even used it as moral and emotional support. Imagine a European country today in which the minorities genuinely feel that those in charge would never give them up, that they are the salt of that particular piece of earth, and that they will always have a home within the national borders in question. The irony of the situation is that the territory of former Yugoslavia, which once held a rich ethnic mélange, is now more bereft than other European nations that never before experienced such a movement of peoples and rebalancing of national demographics. There is an economic rationale to this social restructuring to be sure, and also political shifts, but as we look back with hindsight we can already hold up Socialist Yugoslavia as exemplary of the best collection of nations and ethnicities.

Again, something biblical can be sensed in this brief parable about Egypt, lost tribes, and the desire to reclaim people, to urge people to come home. In *Black and White*, people are not rooted. Reuben is constantly traveling. Likewise, Reuben's Serbian friend Saša has returned home to Novi Sad from London, but finds himself on the road again by the end of the film. Saša's father, Steve, abandons his home and spends most of his time on a *salaš*, or ranch, trying to reclaim a sense of who he is. Milena, Reuben's girlfriend, is banned from leaving home after her father discovers she is in a relationship with an African man. The homeless musician that Reuben and Saša meet sleeping under Steve's window also lives an itinerant lifestyle.

Salt was an extremely significant substance in biblical times, a symbol that surpassed most others. Salt fertilized soil, and it was also used as currency. The idea of people as "the salt of the earth" can be traced back to the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament, the thirteenth verse of the fifth chapter, which has been translated as: "You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its flavor, with what will it be salted? It is then good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men." That can be taken as a warning. Lose not the flavor, the variety, the beautiful differences in men and women, otherwise something elemental, something essential, has been forsaken. This is the subtextual message that Reuben's presence in Novi Sad carries, which is the message of Žilnik's film, which stands as a cautionary tale for the region and beyond, just like the verses from the Book of Revelation that Saša's friend cites to him and Reuben.

In addition to the implicit argument for cultural exchange and close contact for the betterment of society, Žilnik makes a genre pastiche out of *Black and White*. The film opens and closes on the road and its characters are always in transit, and so the genre of the road movie is evoked, in which characters must follow a predetermined path but never actually reach their destination. The film also contains elements of the romantic melodrama, with forbidden love at the core and what seems like the entire world set against the two lovers. There is also the western, with remote settings away from

Black and White (film stills), 1990.

TOP Vladimir Janković-Džet (left) and bandmates.

BOTTOM Reuben Oyeyle.

urban locales, horses, farms, and shootouts. The music of the film can also be seen as a pastiche or mélange. There are the African rhythms melded with African American spirituals that Reuben and his comrades play. There is the heavy metal that Steve and his band are involved with, and the rock music of his youth. And there is the iconic strains of Ennio Morricone and his scores for Sergio Leone's famous westerns. All of this creates a world in which cultures intermingle and thrive off of one another.

Saša's aforementioned friend, who turns religious after a life of sin, speaks about the end times, the last days, and the fires that follow. Later in the film, Reuben teaches the homeless musician the song "When the Saints Go Marching In." It is an old spiritual, as well as a biblical reference to the Apocalypse, with stars falling from the sky and the moon turning red with blood. These are not-so-coded warnings for the characters in the film, whose world is spinning out of control due to corruption, intolerance, and other deadly evils. This is not the famous, friendly Novi Sad but rather a region possessed by a sort of fever. If we follow the song "Paranoid," the structuring motif of the film, then we might get a better sense of the affliction sweeping the area. Steve and his makeshift band constantly rehearse this song by the group Black Sabbath. The lyrics speak to an unsatisfied feeling, about the need to pacify, about being blind to true happiness, and about it being too late to enjoy life. Black Sabbath's name recalls the title of Žilnik's film, but, once again, it also conjures biblical notions. The Sabbath is a day of religious observance, and also a day to refrain from work. However, when choosing it for their name, the band likely had in mind the secondary definition: a midnight meeting held by witches. This is the devil worship that Saša's friend fears, that he feels is indicative of the last days—and he is not far off in his prediction, as Novi Sad indeed proves to be an untenable proposition for all the characters in the film.

Black and White is very similar to *Logbook_Serbistan* in the way that borders are treated, in the way that internationalism is prioritized. Borders need to be crossed, though the prospects of finding happiness on the other side are dimmed in *Black and White*. *Logbook_Serbistan* offers the idea that the borders you cross en route, unexpectedly, might lead to more hospitable conditions than the ones demarcating your final destination. Internationalist outlooks are a source of paranoia in *Black and White*. When Saša tells his father that he can work as a DJ in London, Steve laughs in response and tells him he is crazy. When Reuben explains the value of his university degree to Saša, and that he can work anywhere, particularly because he speaks multiple languages, Saša laughs it off and tells him he is crazy. People are paranoid about the borders they cross—but they know they must cross them or wither away where they stand. The migrants in *Logbook_Serbistan* are much more idealistic about the borders they cross, despite the fact they face police repression, hate, and minimal opportunities at their destinations. Their belief that there is something better on the other side is what keeps them going.

Žilnik has always carefully noted this quality in travelers, rendering them in moving images accordingly. The internationalist stance of his cinema is indissociable from a humanist stance. Not black or white, but black *and* white.

In the city of Munich in Germany, there is a borough formed out of two districts: Au and Haidhausen. This borough was originally an area with accommodations for trade workers and day laborers. The Franzosenviertel, or French Quarter, is located in Au-Haidhausen, which receives its Gallic signification for the many streets named after the locations of victories in the Franco-Prussian War of the nineteenth century. This neighborhood is where the address Metzstrasse 11 can be found.

The film *Inventory* (1975) is just that: a cataloging of the occupants of the apartment building at Metzstrasse 11. It is a short, structural, minimalist documentary experiment for which Žilnik placed his 16 mm camera at the bottom of a staircase in a fixed position and allowed all the residents of the building to flow downstairs, pause, introduce themselves and their living conditions, and then continue walking down the next flight of stairs. This cataloging is significant because most of the building's occupants are *Gastarbeiter*, or guest workers, who have come from all over Europe to contribute to the West German gross domestic product and to earn some money to send to extended families back home.[03] There are Italians, Greeks, Turks, and Yugoslavs. They come from the south or southeast of Europe, and many of them speak of not earning much money or of having a hard time adjusting to life in West Germany. We might view this situation as the inverse of the Non-Aligned Movement, where there is no mutual respect or meaningful cultural exchange, only the hunt for capital.

Elsewhere I have written that Žilnik uses his camera like a scalpel rather than a paintbrush, to excise and examine rather than to decorate. This aesthetic of social analysis can be seen clearly in *Inventory*. On the surface the film has a cold, surgical quality, heightened by the stringent formal position the camera assumes. But the accumulated effect of the film is a warm and very human argument for upward social mobility, for better working and living conditions, for the emancipation of the international working class.

We should note that the workers Žilnik trains his camera-eye on are usually considered European "others" or minorities and are often charged with being a drain on affluent, developed society and its resources. Žilnik has always sided with the marginalized, with those living on the outskirts as outcasts. Like President Tito told President Nasser, these are the best people, and he would not forsake them. Žilnik is also demonstrating here his solidarity and affinity for the full cultural spectrum of the world, for the cohabitation of those with different backgrounds, different experiences, and different worldviews. He knows that this elemental compound forms the salt,

Inventory (film stills), 1975

03
The only exception are two young German-speaking women, one of whom introduces herself as an office secretary living in the building because she does not earn much and the apartment is inexpensive.

the seasoning of the earth, and that anything less is a dangerous experiment in unnatural social engineering.

Inventory is also exemplary of Žilnik's internationalist artistic method, as someone who takes his camera across borders to aid and participate in liberation struggles. Žilnik shot a number of films in West Germany that soon put him into direct conflict with the state. These were ruthlessly critical films, always designed to uncover injustice—no different than the types of films he made in Socialist Yugoslavia before and post-Socialist Yugoslavia after. One can imagine that a film like *Inventory* could actually be made every few years, as a renewed attempt to take stock of the way we treat our neighbors, the way the economy works or does not work for those in the most precarious situations, and how people live when they cross borders in search of a decent existence.

The history and nexus of what has been called structuralist-materialist film has been drawn with tight borders around Western Europe and North America. Scant room in the canon is allocated to films that are non-aligned in relation to these cine-powers. The canon serves at the leisure of these powers, and it has often served as a weapon. The formal rigor of *Inventory* derives a great deal of its power from an adherence to a structuralist aesthetic. Jean-Luc Godard once called tracking shots a question of morality. For Žilnik, the placement of the camera and allowing the world to flow around and through it is the chief moral concern. Instead of tracking, he allows the people to create the movement in relation to the apparatus. In structural film, the camera often assumes an amoral stance, or an apolitical field of vision. Here Žilnik politicizes the experimental, because he knows that taking inventory is something more than an inert taking of stock. People's lives are at stake, and their integral qualities should be preserved, and so the camera must bear witness. However, Žilnik's is an interventionist cinema, not a neutral one. He picks his spots with care and orchestrates accordingly. The structuralism he evokes and analyzes is the structure of society, the structure of a building, the architecture of social relations. Form follows function, and the material he works with is the human subject, the souls of all types of folks. The old directors of the classical period were fond of saying that there is nothing more beautiful and mysterious, nothing so consequential, as pointing a camera at a human face. They were right, but they often only looked for a certain type of face, representing a certain type of experience, serving a certain type of viewer. Žilnik, in opposition, takes inventory of the full range of faces that in their variety and combinable nature constitute the beauty and wonder of the world. There is no world without these faces. And the director who does not open their eyes to them, who does not open the world to them, is no director.

Metzstrasse in the twenty-first century, more than forty years after Žilnik's film was shot, is full of trendy cafés and restaurants. It is just another increasingly expensive neighborhood in an increasingly

expensive Munich. It would be hard to imagine *Gastarbeiter* living there now. Max-Weber-Platz is right around the corner from Metzstrasse. The founding father of the discipline of sociology once wrote: “Modern capitalism has as little use for *liberum arbitrium* persons as laborers as it has for the businessman fully without scruples in the running of his company.”[04] True indeed, but postmodern capitalism is a different beast.

Postscript

Vojvodina is an autonomous province in the north of the Republic of Serbia. The province measures 21,506 km^2, which is more than the area of either Montenegro or the Republic of Slovenia. Out of this land, 75 percent is cultivable, measuring 1,628,000 hectares. In fact, Vojvodina has the most fertile land in Europe. This is because of the heavy presence of chernozem that spans the plain.[05]

Because of this uncommonly fertile soil, Vojvodina has attracted immigrants throughout its history. Indeed, by its position and geographical structure, Vojvodina is a natural bridge between Central Europe, the Balkan Peninsula, and the Middle East. As a result, and by its national structure, Vojvodina represents a special ethnic phenomenon, perhaps unlike any other in the history of the continent. In the 2002 census, 2,031,992 people were recorded as residing in Vojvodina. For over 150 years, no ethnic entity has been in the majority, and only in recent decades have Serbs emerged as one in the province—and this happened only through the influx of refugees, as a byproduct of war and intolerance.

04
Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Stephen Kalberg (1905; Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 20.

05
Dragomir Jankov, *Vojvodina, the Ruination of a Region: Data and Facts* (Novi Sad: Vojvodina Club, 2005).

Zoran Paroški and Milan Paroški in *The Old School of Capitalism* (film still), 2009

For centuries in Vojvodina, official languages included Serbian, German, Croatian, Hungarian, Romanian, and Ruthenian, among others. It is said that the vitality of Vojvodina lies in its openness to an inclusive environment, where ethnicities and religions meld together as a polyvalent norm. This ingrained mentality of tolerance and the valuation of difference was achieved by many years of cohabitation. But it is not just that; it is something else, perhaps something indefinable on an elemental level, that makes Vojvodina the unique place it is.

It is likewise believed that Vojvodina represents a political concept rather than a geographical one. That concept might be considered a prototype for the principles of non-alignment, indeed as a prototype for the various Yugoslavias that have existed; yet they have all fallen, and Vojvodina still stands. This latent political potential might be symbolized by the name given to Vojvodina’s capital city: Novi Sad, or Neuestadt, or Neoplanta, or New Seed.

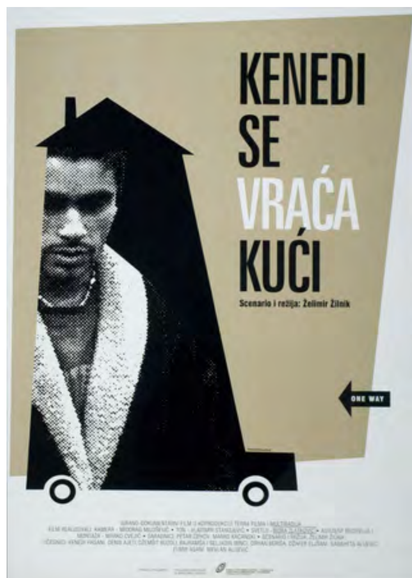
Every botanist knows that “a species can live and reproduce far from its place of origin.”[06] Anthropologists know the same. Sociologists know that, in some cases, peoples and nations must thrive far from their roots. And political scientists know that those unique cases and their rationales are the locomotives of history. Artists should and must know that this spiritual and physical movement of peoples and cultures is a strength, an opportunity to shape the world for the better, and a method for truly knowing your fellow human beings, which means truly accepting them for who they are, and maybe even standing up for them when no one else will. We might venture the hypothesis that the specific political concept that infuses the spirit of Vojvodina allows the autonomous province to cultivate artists who exhibit a correlating political consciousness. Europe would do well with more of these aesthetic phenotypes and the works they create. If only they grew as easily and abundantly as plant life on the Eurasian Steppe.

> These bodies always have their own particular origin; they always and everywhere are the result of the totality of activity of the bedrock, the living and inanimate organisms (plant as well as animal), climate, the age of the country, and the topography of the surroundings.
> —Vasily Dokuchaev[07] ★

06
Anastasia A. Fedotova, “The Origins of the Russian Chernozem (Black Earth): Franz Joseph Ruprecht’s ‘Geo-botanical Researches into the Chernozem’ of 1866,” *Environment and History* 16, no. 3 (August 2010): 271–93.

07
Vasily Dokuchaev, *Collected Works*, vol. 2 (Moscow-Leningrad, 1949), 260.

Greg de Cuir Jr has organized programs at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, DC; Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels; Los Angeles Filmforum; Locarno Film Festival; Flaherty Film Seminar, New York; International Short Film Festival Oberhausen; Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw; Museum of Contemporary Art Vojvodina, Novi Sad; and Alternative Film/Video, Belgrade, among other institutions. De Cuir is Managing Editor of the journal *NECSUS* and Editor of the book series Eastern European Screen Cultures, both published by Amsterdam University Press. His writing has been commissioned by the Centre Pompidou in Paris and Institute of Contemporary Arts in London and featured in *Cineaste*, *Jump Cut*, *Millennium Film Journal*, *ARTMargins*, and other publications.



Kenedi Goes Back Home

Serbia and Montenegro • 2003 • 75 min. • DV to 35 mm

This is a story of Yugoslavs who left the country during the war and spent over ten years in Western Europe as refugees or in asylum. In the second half of 2002, the European Union sent many of these people back to Serbia and Montenegro together with their families, believing there was no longer any reason for their stay. Procedures for their return were usually very strict. Families were gathered during the night, transported to the airport, and sent to Belgrade on the first flight. To make things more dramatic, the majority of children born in Western European countries could speak and write the other language better than their mother tongue. As these families often had to sell everything they owned when leaving, they faced a situation back home where normal life was practically impossible.

Kenedi Goes Back Home follows two friends, Kenedi and Denis, as well as the Ibinci family from Kostolac, during the first couple days after arriving at Belgrade Airport. We see them trying to find accommodation and searching for friends and other family members. Kenedi goes to Kosovska Mitrovica, where his family used to have a house, to which he now does not have access. The film focuses on the position of the Roma people as the most vulnerable part of the returned population.

The making of this film began with research into the situation of children who were born or grew up in Germany and were now being forcibly deported back to Serbia. Žilnik filmed the kids as they sent regards to their former classmates, and when shown in public discussions and forums, this footage stirred public outrage. Žilnik was contacted by the German authorities and it came to light that the German government had given monetary support for each family to the Serbian government, but it never made its way to the deported families to assist their return. Consequently, Žilnik was not allowed at the airport to film the returnees, and by sending out a casting call for someone who spoke German, Serbian, and Romani, he met Kenedi, who could pretend he was at the airport to wait for relatives.

At the same time, Žilnik was contacted by the German Green Party, which sent five parliament members to Serbia to look into the embezzlement of the support funds for the refugees. When they visited expelled families and saw the dire situations in which they were living, the delegation asked Žilnik if he could put together a feature-length film to show at public cinemas in Germany. The Green Party held the opinion that good students and pupils should not be expelled from the country, as Germany needed educated workers. They paid for the production house Terra Film to produce a 35 mm print, and the film went on tour in North Rhine-Westphalia, Hessen, and Berlin. It stirred a lot of debate in the cities where it was screened, and even led to decisions in certain cities to stop the deportation of young people. The film was also shown in regional parliaments and at the European Parliament, as well as discussed at the Asylpolitisches Forum Deutschland. Žilnik went on to make two more films with Kenedi. ●

TOP LEFT *Kenedi Goes Back Home* (poster), 2003
TOP RIGHT Denis Ajeti and Kenedi Hasani in *Kenedi Goes Back Home* (film stills), 2003
BOTTOM LEFT AND RIGHT *Kenedi Goes Back Home* (film stills), 2003

Žilnik's experimental attitude was an attempt to go beyond simple contradictions (usually manifested in the dichotomy between what was "official" and what was "dissident") and, following the logic set out by the "materialist dialectic"—to use this inverted term as it was originally used by Engels, which seems more appropriate than the "dialectic materialism" perverted by Stalinism—to locate symptomal opposites in material practices through which they may be set in motion and not left in their idealist contradictions.

—Branislav Dimitrijević, "Concrete Analysis of Concrete Situations: Marxist Education According to Želimir Žilnik," *Afterall*, Autumn/Winter 2010, 51.

žž: I think that the basic characteristic of that so-called public engagement you're talking about is in fact being chameleon-like. People sail under false colors, they present their earlier work under false pretenses, and keep on working on, driving this unfortunate people of ours insane. I'm sick when I see the people who, until recently, until two years ago, carried the flag of nationalism and whom we can consider to be the main culprits of spreading hatred and fascism, how they're attempting to make fools of us all, as if we didn't know that the beast being released from the cage is their fault too. In our public sphere, as has been common in the past decades, there's a lot of bragging and little referring to one's own work. I think that what is called our alleged public sphere is a big circus, and of course a horror similar to the circus and the horror of the official fascism.

[INTERVIEWER]: Don't you see an option you might possibly join?

žž: Well, what I see is, for example, the human rights movement. Anyway, I don't deal with anything else but human rights. In films, in TV programs—the experience of being hindered, again, in any way. Everything I've done was either not socialist enough, or not Serbian enough, or not Non-Aligned enough, or too Non-Aligned …

—Želimir Žilnik, interview, "These Are Only Old Movies," *Nezavisni vojvođanski građanski list*, January 15, 1993.

The Old School of Capitalism (poster), 2009. DESIGNED BY ANDREJ DOLINKA.

Biography — Želimir Žilnik

Želimir Žilnik (born 1942; living and working in Novi Sad, Serbia) has written and directed numerous feature and documentary films. From the very beginning, his films have focused on contemporary issues, featuring social, political, and economic assessments of everyday life (*A Newsreel on Village Youth, in Winter*, 1967; *Little Pioneers*, 1968; *The Unemployed*, 1968; *June Turmoil*, 1969; *Black Film*, 1971; *Uprising in Jazak*, 1973).

The student demonstrations of 1968 and the turmoil that followed the occupation of Czechoslovakia are at the center of Žilnik's first feature film, *Early Works* (1969), which was awarded the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale) and four prizes at Pula Film Festival that same year.

After facing problems with censorship in Yugoslavia during work on his second feature film, *Freedom or Cartoons* (1972, produced by Neoplanta Film, not completed), Žilnik spent the mid-1970s in Germany, where he independently made seven documentaries and one feature film, *Paradise. An Imperialist Tragicomedy* (1976). These films were among the first ever to touch on the foreign workforce, or *Gastarbeiter,* in West Germany, and they continue to be shown to this day at various retrospectives and symposia.

Following his return to Yugoslavia at the end of the 1970s, he directed a substantial series of television films and docudramas for TV Belgrade and TV Novi Sad (*The Illness and Recovery of Buda Brakus*, 1980; *Vera and Eržika*, 1981; *Dragoljub and Bogdan: Electricity*, 1982; *The First Trimester of Pavle Hromiš*, 1983; *Stanimir Descending*, 1984; *Good Morning Belgrade*, 1985; *Hot Paychecks*, 1987; *Brooklyn–Gusinje*, 1988; *Oldtimer*, 1989; *Black and White*, 1990; and others).

By the end of the 1980s, Žilnik was making films through a cooperative production structure of television and cinema, each work foreshadowing the growing tensions and looming political and social changes that were to affect the country (*The Second Generation*, 1984; *Pretty Women Walking through the City*, 1986; *The Way Steel Was Tempered*, 1988).

Turning to independent film and media production in the 1990s, he went on to make a series of feature and documentary films revolving around the cataclysmic events in the Balkans (*Tito among the Serbs for the Second Time*, 1994; *Marble Ass*, 1995; *Throwing Off the Yolks of Bondage*, 1996; *Wanderlust*, 1998). In 1995, *Marble Ass* won the prestigious Teddy Award at the Berlinale.

The breakdown of the system of values in post-transitional Central and Eastern European countries and the problems concerning refugees and migration in the new circumstances of an extended Europe became the focus of Žilnik's most recent films, from *Fortress Europe* (2000), to *Logbook_Serbistan* (2015), to *The Most Beautiful Country in the World* (2018).

Films by Želimir Žilnik have won numerous awards at national and international film festivals. Recently, his work has been the subject of major career film retrospectives at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2019; Cinemateca Argentina, Buenos Aires, 2018; Mar del Plata International Film Festival, 2017; Anthology Film Archives, New York, and Harvard Film Archive, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2017; Ankara International Film Festival, 2016; Doclisboa, 2015; Arsenal, Berlin, 2015; Cinusp, São Paulo, 2014; Thessaloniki International Film Festival, 2014, and more.

Since 2010, his work has also been featured in the programs of art galleries, museums, and art institutes around the world, including documenta, Kassel; Venice Biennale; Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; mumok–Museum Moderner Kunst Foundation Ludwig Wien; Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art; MACBA–Museo Universitario Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico City; and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid.

Most recently, in 2018–19, Žilnik's films and video installations have been featured in the programs of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Renaissance Society, Chicago; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Flaherty Seminar, New York, Edith-Russ-Haus for Media Art, Oldenburg; Lentos Art Museum, Linz; MMK–Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt; German Historical Museum, Berlin; Arsenal–Institute for Film and Video Art, Berlin; and Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome, among others.

Alongside his ceaseless filmmaking and production work, Žilnik has been active in educational areas: since 1997 he has been a mentor and executive producer in many international workshops, in both Europe and the United States. ●

Dragana Đurić and Alenka Zdešar
on the set of *Freedom or Cartoons*, 1971.
PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

Around 1965 when I started collaborating with Avala Film the Yugoslavian system was in a process of trying to prove its distinction against the Soviet Union. The organizational structure of self-management, which until then existed only in the industrial field, was just introduced into the cultural policies. The system of self-management was extremely successful in the process of the reconstruction and industrialization of the country and this success gave us a critical energy.

Workers, who were part of that system, really felt [like] the co-owners of the factories; they believed they could really influence decisions made by directors. But we, filmmakers, were actually part of the free market since we were not employed. We were more outside of the system than in the system. We saw that all the benefits of the system—a permanent safe job, good pensions, [a right to] housing, [including that] workers would be given a flat in a new housing compound and a permanent tenancy—were diminishing the revolutionary potential of the workers and transforming them into socialist *kleinburgers*. The transformation of the country from year to year we had been witnessing was huge. And this is what we drew inspiration from.

—Želimir Žilnik, in conversation with Dubravka Sekulić, Gal Kirn, and Žiga Testen, in *Surfing the Black: Yugoslav Black Wave Cinema and Its Transgressive Moments,* ed. Gal Kirn, Dubravka Sekulić, and Žiga Testen (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Academie, 2012), 60–62.

Želimir Žilnik and Karpo Godina on the set of *Freedom or Cartoons*, 1971. PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

LEFT TO RIGHT Aleksandar Mitrović, Ljubomir Bečejski, and Želimir Žilnik on the set of *Market People*, 1977. PHOTO BY VLADIMIR ČERVENKA.

Market People (film stills), 1977

The television is a priori free of the mystifications of film work. Here [in Yugoslavia], a part of film mystification exists because people rub off on film. Each brick moved in a film has fivefold greater significance and cost. Spending on television is big—labor is valued more realistically. When we talk about film, we talk about the market, price, goods, turnover, while out of thirty-something films produced annually, only two, three, earn back a portion of the investment. If there were any economic thinking , the rest of the producers would have to go bankrupt. The law on a market this small should be: financial modesty, collaboration with television, and extraordinary investments only after possible commercial effects have been expertly verified. While here, dozens of filmmakers are sitting waiting for Hollywood spectacles!

Television is closer to a normal relation to life. […] TV Novi Sad has fifty great cameras, thirty filmcutting boards, and that's a technical foundation a hundred or a thousand times stronger than the one camera at Neoplanta, around which there are hundreds of mystifications. Television has become the art of the widest masses, and it has also begun to deal with popular culture. When I had an opportunity to participate in television, I did it with an awareness of its possibilities, and I tried to participate in some aspects of that power. A man feels normal working on television. He knows that everything that is normal and good has already been broadcast on TV, and the very fact that he himself speaks means that he is an integrated man. Television has the possibility to constantly investigate the fundamental value of our society: diversity.

—Želimir Žilnik, interview, "Getting a Film Made Is Getting a Mandate," *TV Novosti*, May 14, 1982.

Filmography

1967
Žurnal o omladini na selu, zimi
A Newsreel on Village Youth, in Winter
15 min.
35 mm
Neoplanta Film

1968
Pioniri maleni mi smo vojska prava, svakog dana ničemo ko zelena trava
Little Pioneers
18 min.
35 mm
Neoplanta Film

Nezaposleni ljudi
The Unemployed
13 min.
35 mm
Neoplanta Film

1969
Lipanjska gibanja
June Turmoil
10 min.
35 mm
Neoplanta Film

Rani radovi
Early Works
87 min.
35 mm
Avala Film • Neoplanta Film

1971
Crni film
Black Film
14 min.
16 mm ➡ 35 mm
Neoplanta Film

1972
Žene dolaze
The Women Are Coming
12 min.
16 mm
Neoplanta Film

Sloboda ili strip
Freedom or Cartoons
unfinished
35 mm & 16 mm
Neoplanta Film

1973
Ustanak u Jasku
Uprising in Jazak
18 min.
35 mm
Panfilm

1974
Antrag
Request
10 min.
16 mm ➡ 35 mm
Vlada Majic Filmproduktion KG

Öffentliche Hinrichtung
Public Execution
9 min.
35 mm
Vlada Majic Filmproduktion KG

1975
Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten
I Do Not Know What That Should Mean
9 min.
35 mm
Vlada Majic Filmproduktion KG

Abschied
Farewell
9 min.
16 mm
Vlada Majic Filmproduktion KG

Inventur – Metzstraße 11
Inventory
9 min.
16 mm
Alligator Film

Unter Denkmalschutz
Under the Protection of the State
11 min.
16 mm
Alligator Film

Hausordnung
House Orders
12 min.
35 mm
Vlada Majic Filmproduktion KG

1976
Paradies. Eine imperialistische Tragikomödie
Paradise. An Imperialist Tragicomedy
90 min.
16 mm
Alligator Film

1977
Placmajstori
Market People
29 min.
16 mm
TV Novi Sad

Komedija i tragedija Bore Joksimovića
The Comedy and Tragedy of Bora Joksimović
30 min.
16 mm
TV Novi Sad

1978
Naše zvezde sa ekrana duševna su naša hrana
Stars of 45 Turning in Your Mind
10 min.
35 mm
TV Novi Sad

Sedam mađarskih balada
Seven Hungarian Ballads
30 min.
16 mm
TV Novi Sad

1979
Dobrovoljci
Volunteers
30 min.
16 mm
TV Novi Sad

1980
Bolest i ozdravljenje Bude Brakusa
The Illness and Recovery of Buda Brakus
98 min.
16 mm
TV Novi Sad

1981
Vera i Eržika
Vera and Eržika
75 min.
16 mm
TV Novi Sad

1982
Dragoljub i Bogdan: struja
Dragoljub and Bogdan: Electricity
85 min.
16 mm
TV Beograd

1983
Prvo tromesečje Pavla Hromiša
The First Trimester of Pavle Hromiš
87 min.
16 mm
TV Novi Sad

1984
Druga generacija
The Second Generation
87 min.
16 mm ➡ 35 mm
Art film • TV Novi Sad

Stanimir silazi u grad
Stanimir Descending
75 min.
16 mm
TV Beograd

1985
Beograde dobro jutro
Good Morning Belgrade
57 min.
16 mm
TV Beograd

1986
Lijepe žene prolaze kroz grad
Pretty Women Walking through the City
103 min.
35 mm
Art Film

Posrnule ovčice
Stumbling Sheep
46 min.
Betacam
TV Novi Sad

1987
Vruće plate
Hot Paychecks
103 min.
Betacam
TV Novi Sad

1988
Bruklin – Gusinje
Brooklyn – Gusinje
87 min.
16 mm
TV Beograd

Tako se kalio čelik
The Way Steel Was Tempered
101 min.
35 mm
Terra Film

1989
Stara mašina
Oldtimer
81 min.
16 mm
TV Ljubljana

1990
Crno i belo
Black and White
58 min.
Betacam
TV Novi Sad

1993
Silos Dunav, Vukovar
Silo Danube, Vukovar
1 min.
35 mm
Terra Film

1994
Tito po drugi put među Srbima
Tito among the Serbs for the Second Time
43 min.
Betacam
B92

1995
Marble Ass
84 min.
Betacam ➡ 35 mm
B92

1996
Do jaja
Throwing Off the Yolks of Bondage
12 min.
Betacam
B92

1997
Za Ellu
For Ella
10 min.
Betacam
Terra film

1998
Kud plovi ovaj brod
Wanderlust
91 min.
Betacam ➡ 35 mm
Teresianum b.t. • VP Kregar • Terra Film • Kvadrat • TV Crna Gora

2000
Trđava Evropa
Fortress Europe
80 min.
Betacam
Low Budget Production • RTV Slovenia

Cosmo Girls
27 min.
Betacam
Teresianum b.t.

2002
EXIT ujutru
EXIT in the Morning
12 min.
Betacam
Terra Film • Radio 021

2003
Kenedi se vraća kući
Kenedi Goes Back Home
75 min.
DV ➡ 35 mm
Terra Film • Multiradio

2005
Evropa preko plota
Europe Next Door
61 min.
DV
Terra Film

Gde je dve godine bio Kenedi
Kenedi, Lost and Found
26 min.
DV
Terra Film

2006
Dunavska sapunska opera
Soap in Danube Opera
70 min.
DV
Terra Film

2007
Kenedi se ženi
Kenedi Is Getting Married
80 min.
DV ➡ 35 mm
Terra Film • Jet Company VKTV

2009
Stara škola kapitalizma
The Old School of Capitalism
122 min.
DV & HD ➡ 35 mm
Playground produkcija

2011
Jedna žena – jedan vek
One Woman – One Century
110 min.
HD
Playground produkcija

2013
Pirika na filmu
Pirika on Film
54 min.
HD
Playground produkcija

2014
Naš čovek u Gabonu
Our Man in Gabon
66 min.
HD
Žilnik produkcija

2015
Destinacija_Serbistan
Logbook_Serbistan
94 min.
HD ➡ DCP
Playground produkcija

2018
Among the People: Life & Acting
83 min.
HD
Žilnik produkcija, Edith-Russ-Haus for Media Art

The Most Beautiful Country in the World
101 min.
HD ➡ DCP
nanookfilm • Tramal Films • Factum • RTV Vojvodina

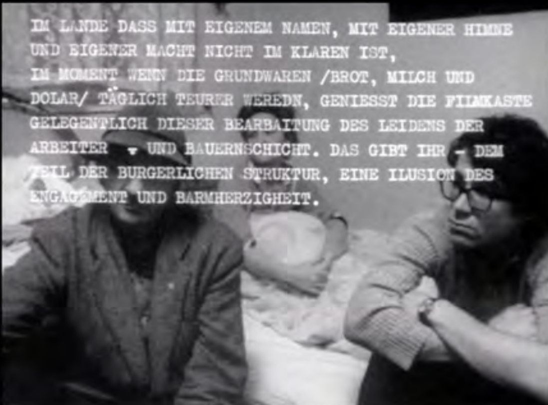
2019
Où en êtes-vous, Želimir Žilnik?
Where Do You Stand Today, Želimir Žilnik?
20 min.
HD ➡ DCP
Playground produkcija • Centre Pompidou

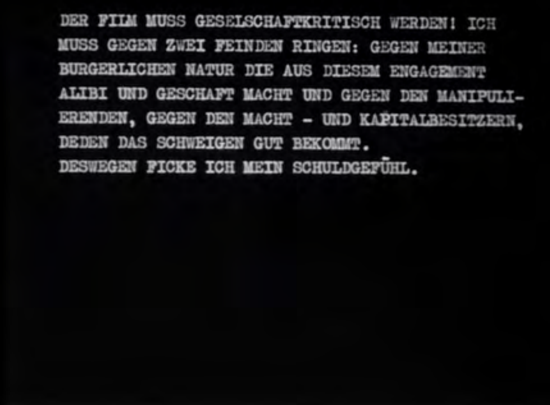
EDITORS' NOTE: The English film titles listed here are the international distribution titles.

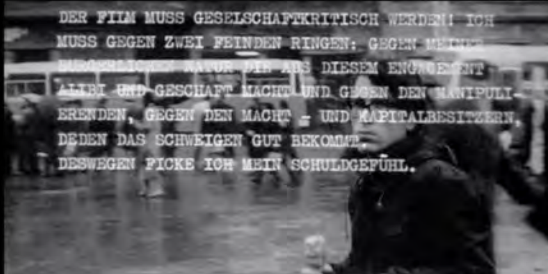
Želimir Žilnik on the set of *Freedom or Cartoons*, 1971.
PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

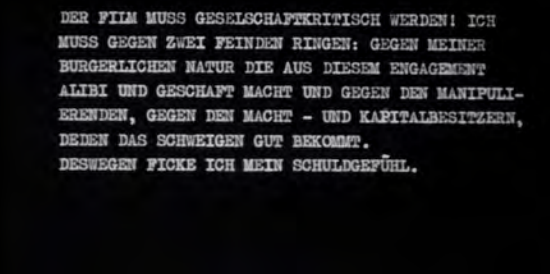
Those authorities of ours, which we usually find incompetent, were utterly successful in one thing—the endeavor to spill the blood of the nationalities [that comprised] the region of former Yugoslavia. In my opinion, it was manufactured hatred, and the process began years before the war broke out. We were undergoing the horrors of late fascism, when nation-states were created in a war effort headed by the [various] tribes' elders. The fact is that, only when I come to Croatia can I speak the language that you understand, just like you understand my films. These nations have so much in common that even that love and that hatred resemble some family fights, which can be very brutal.

—Želimir Žilnik, interview, "From Early Works to Late Wars," *Zarez*, April 7, 2000.









Black Film Manifesto

In 1971, Žilnik was invited to the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, but was unable to attend. Instead of addressing the audience and media in person, he wrote a manifesto (originally in Serbo-Croatian), whose German translation was printed onto the film itself. This copy was shown only at Oberhausen and the film was never screened elsewhere in this form, until the 2018 exhibition at the Edith-Russ-Haus. Film stills printed here are from this very copy. The English text is a translation from the Serbo-Croatian.

LEFT
Black Film (film stills), 1971

1. You are observing the class structure of Yugoslav society. The lumpenproletariat and "humanist intelligentsia." Instrumentalized exploitation of the poor for filmic purposes. A lesson to family Žilnik regarding the hungry, the dirty, and the stinky. The child needs to be shown what life really is.
2. In the country that is not quite sure in its name, anthem, or government, at the moment when basic needs (bread, milk, and dollars) are becoming increasingly expensive, the film caste is narcissistically enjoying the "elaboration" of the workers' and peasants' suffering. This enables them, as constitutive elements of the part of civic structure that manipulates society, an illusion of engagement and compassion.
3. Everybody should be screwed, including oneself. Starting with scattering one's own marital bed! How would we feel if the wretches really started putting it up our asses? Luckily that is not going to happen.
4. I still need to make socially engaged films though. Because I am confronting two enemies— Firstly, my petit bourgeois nature that transforms my engagement into an alibi and a business opportunity, and secondly, the powerful manipulators and structures of power who would only benefit from my silence. This is why I say "fuck you" to my feeling of guilt.
5. FILM—WEAPON OR BULLSHIT?
6. Look again at point 4.

Alenka Zdešar and Dragana Đurić on the set of *Freedom or Cartoons*, 1971. PHOTO BY ANDREJ POPOVIĆ.

Edit Molnár is a curator currently based in Germany. She earned her MA in Art History and Art Theory from Eötvös Lóránd University, Budapest. From 2000 to 2005, she was Director of the Studio Gallery, Budapest, the nonprofit exhibition space of the Studio of Young Artists Association; from 2005 to 2007, she worked as a curator at Műcsarnok | Kunsthalle, Budapest; and from 2007 to 2009, she was Director of the Cairo-based independent nonprofit institution the Contemporary Image Collective. Since 2015, she has been Co-director, together with Marcel Schwierin, of the Edith-Russ-Haus for Media Art in Oldenburg.

Marcel Schwierin is a curator, filmmaker, and co-founder of the Werkleitz Biennial in Halle, the experimental film database cinovid, and the Arab Shorts film festival in Cairo. His films include *The Images* (experimental, 1994) and *Eternal Beauty* (feature-length documentary, 2003). He has regularly curated for the Werkleitz Biennial, the Goethe-Institut, and the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, among others. From 2010 to 2015, he was Curator of Film and Video for transmediale in Berlin. Since 2015, he has been Co-director, together with Edit Molnár, of the Edith-Russ-Haus for Media Art in Oldenburg.

What, How & for Whom / WHW is a curatorial collective that formed in 1999 in Zagreb. Its members are curators Ivet Ćurlin, Ana Dević, Nataša Ilić, and Sabina Sabolović and designer and publicist Dejan Kršić. WHW organizes a range of production, exhibition, and publishing projects and since 2003 has directed the city-owned Gallery Nova in Zagreb. Since its first exhibition, titled *What, How & for Whom, on the occasion of the 152nd anniversary of the Communist Manifesto,* which took place in Zagreb in 2000, WHW has curated numerous international projects. These include, most recently, *Everything we see could also be otherwise* (*My sweet little lamb*), cocurated with Kathrin Rhomberg and held at various locations in Zagreb in 2016–17; and the 2nd Industrial Art Biennial: *On the Shoulders of Fallen Giants*, held across Croatia at different venues in the cities of Rijeka, Pula, Labin, Raša, and Vodnjan in 2018. Also in 2018, WHW launched a new international study program for emerging artists called WHW Akademija, based in Zagreb. In March 2019, three members of WHW—Ivet Ćurlin, Nataša Ilić, and Sabina Sabolović—were appointed as Artistic Directors of Kunsthalle Wien. WHW as a collective continues working in Zagreb, where activities are coordinated by Ana Dević. ★

Bans and lawsuits, those petty rebukes, they are not only surgical operations that throw books or films into the garbage, and that's it. On the contrary. Bans and lawsuits, they are incentives—that's a concept, that's a road sign for a practice that attempts to not be sued or banned. It is trite and well known that if critical thinking is on trial, the same procedure richly manures the field where careerism, spinelessness, and slothfulness will shoot up like weeds. The aesthetics of a shut mouth is fly glue. Even the smallest repression will find advocates who, allegedly scared by it, make justifications for all their possible gutless passions. So, if there really were films made by foes, soon enough we'll get the final answer on what kind of film is made by "a friend."

—Želimir Žilnik, interview, "Film Cannot Stand Head Transplantation," *Telegram*, September 15, 1972.

Already from the moment of refeudalization of the state in the mid-1970s, when the local elites began grabbing as much as they could along with establishing their own criteria, it was evident what was in store. Strings were tightening, tensions were rising, and there were two possible outcomes: either a wave of opening, democratization, and freedom, or something that can only end like this, in national elitocracies cutting each other's throats. It was clear to me, but that film, *Pretty Women Walking through the City,* **was relatively unsuccessful. It was probably rumored: Žilnik went nuts! He went soft in the head! … And now when this horrible wound has opened, when what happened happened, when hundreds of thousands of dead bodies and millions of displaced people are behind us, when we witness awful destruction—things are becoming clearer. This mutual destruction could not be created only by politicians.**

—Želimir Žilnik, interview, "Contributions for a Biography," *Ekran 2000,* no. 2, 1995.

Early Works

Photo Essay from *ROK* Magazine

Frühe Werke

Foto-Essay aus dem Magazin *ROK*

PAGES 152 TO 168 Facsimile reproduction of a photo essay originally published in *ROK—Magazine for Literature, Art and Aesthetic Inquiry into Reality*, vol 3. Belgrade, December 1969. EDITED BY BORA ĆOSIĆ, DESIGNED BY BRANKO VUČIĆEVIĆ.

SEITEN 152 BIS 168 Reproduktion eines Foto-Essays aus dem *ROK-Magazin für Literatur, Kunst und ästhetische Erforschung der Wirklichkeit*, Nr. 3, Belgrad, Dezember 1969. HERAUSGEBER: BORA ĆOSIĆ; GESTALTUNG: BRANKO VUČIĆEVIĆ.

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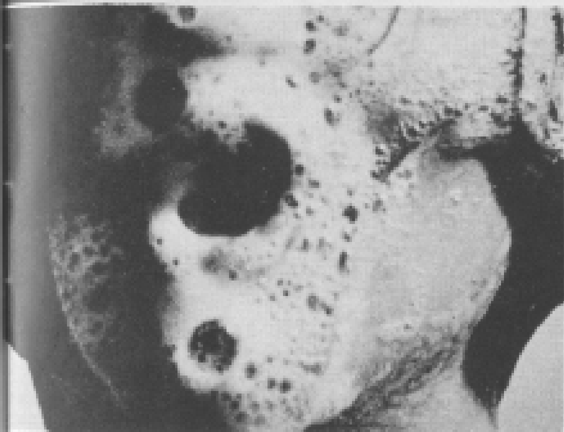

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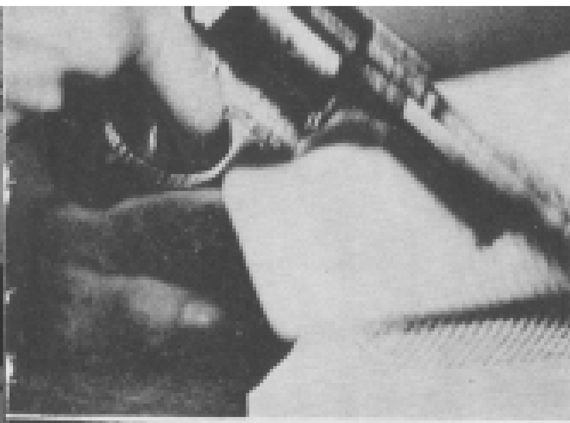

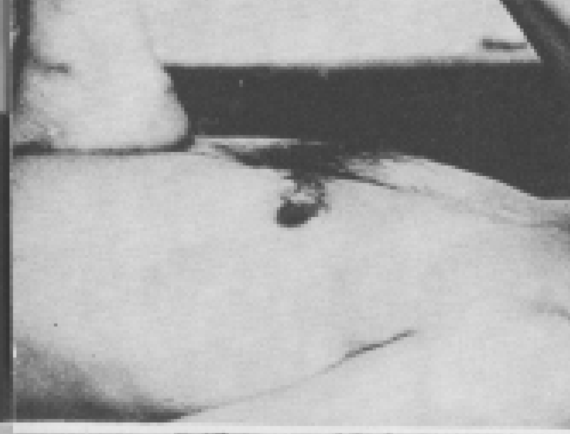

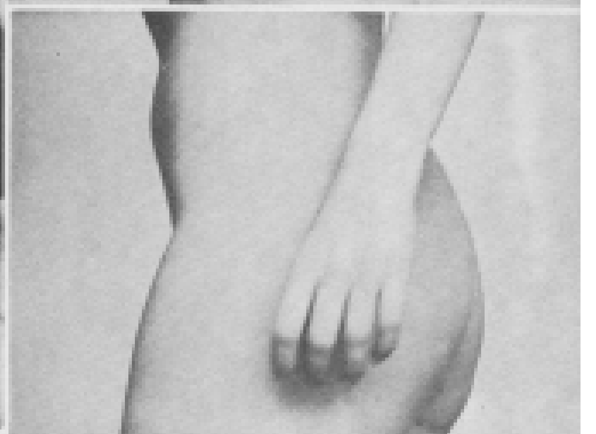

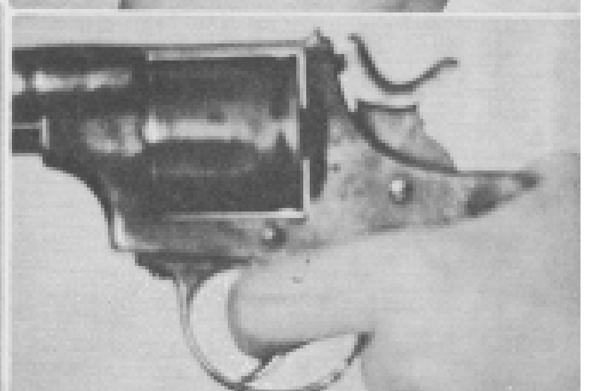

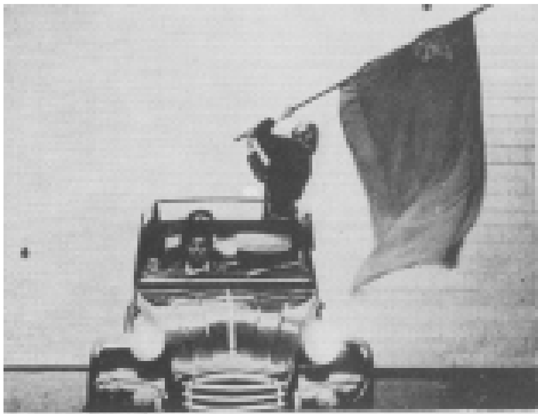

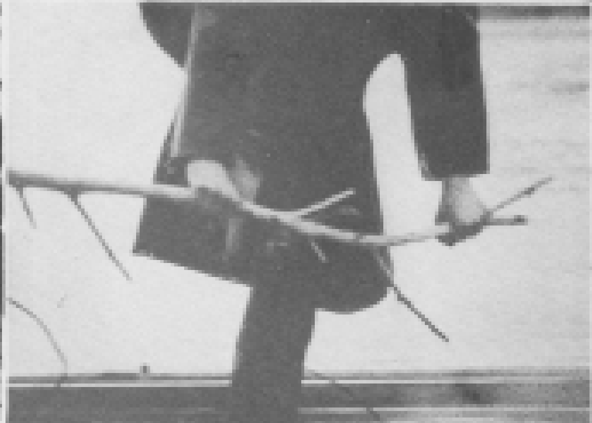

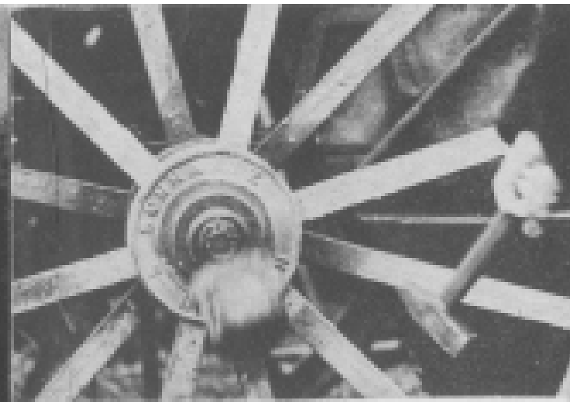

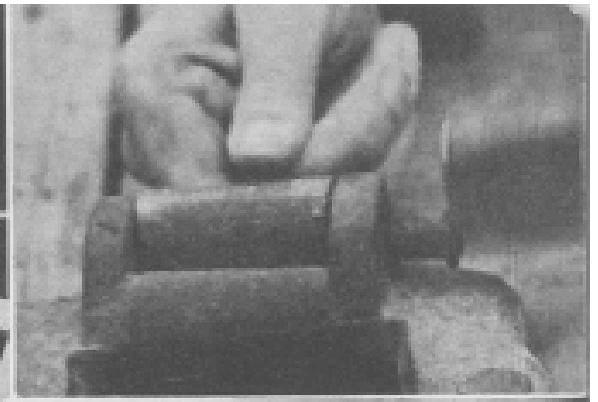

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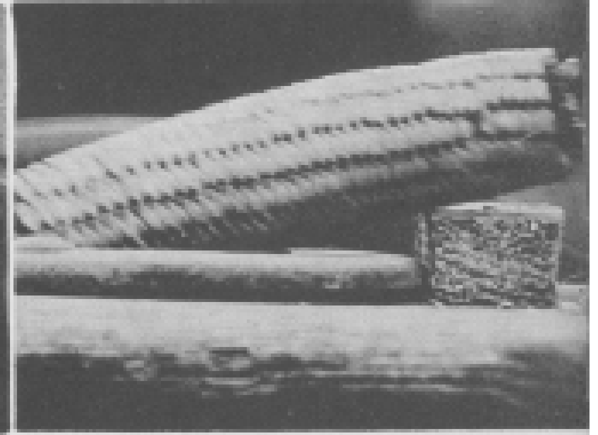

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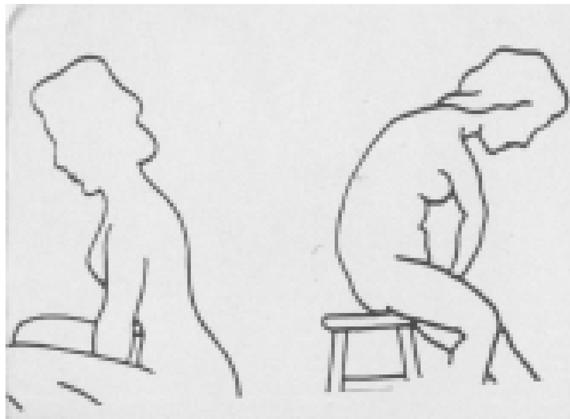

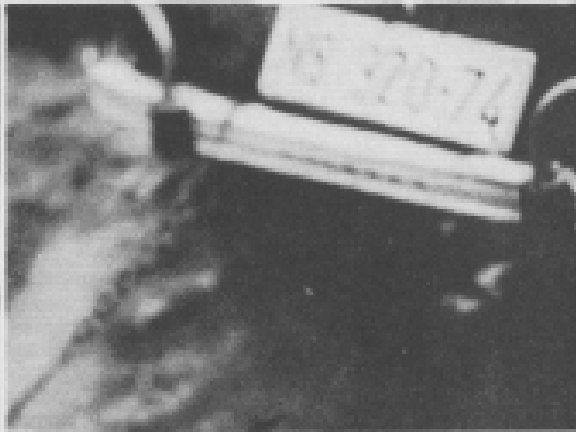

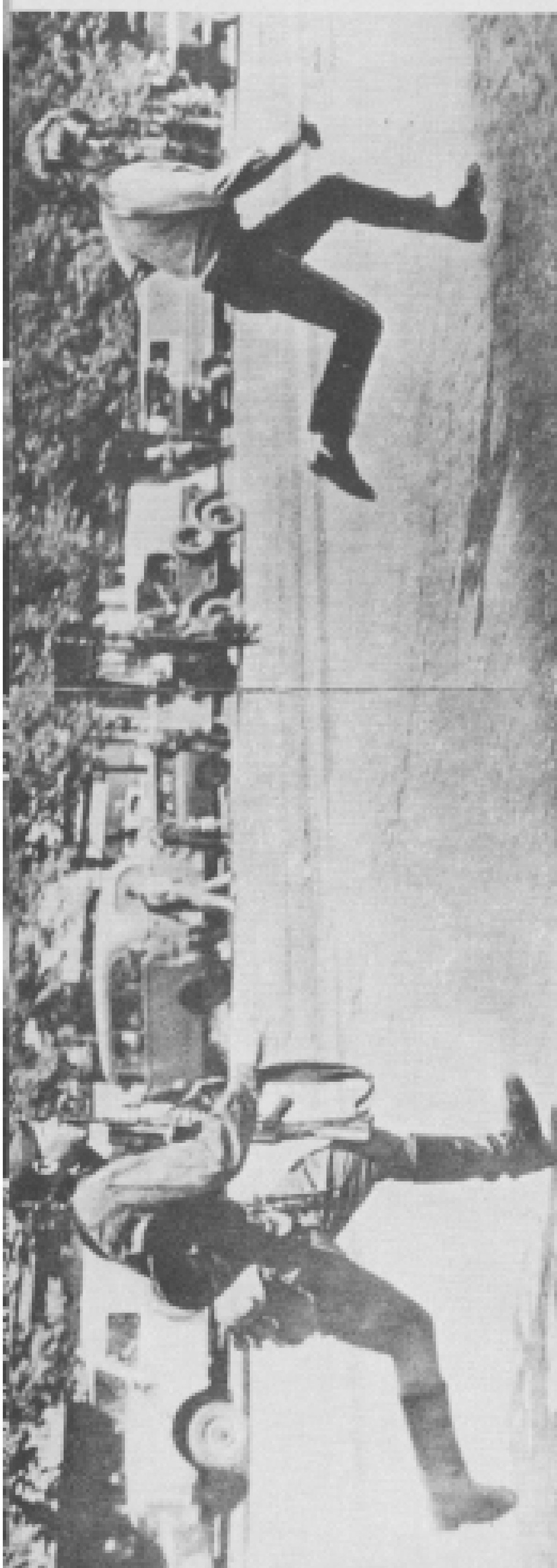

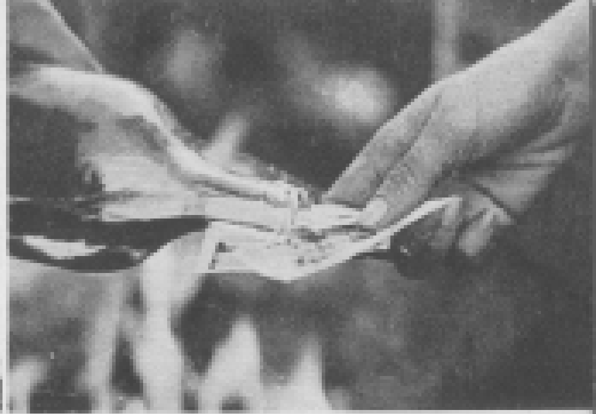

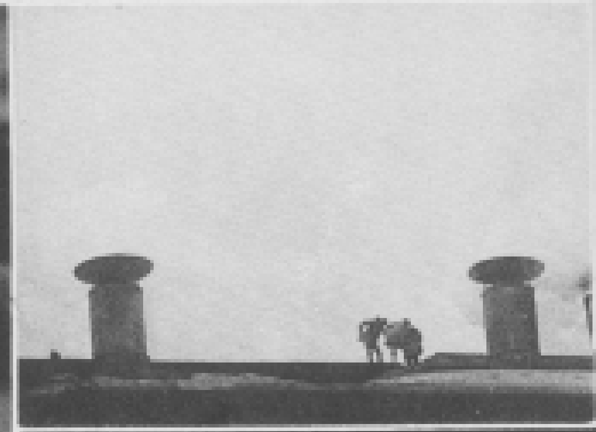

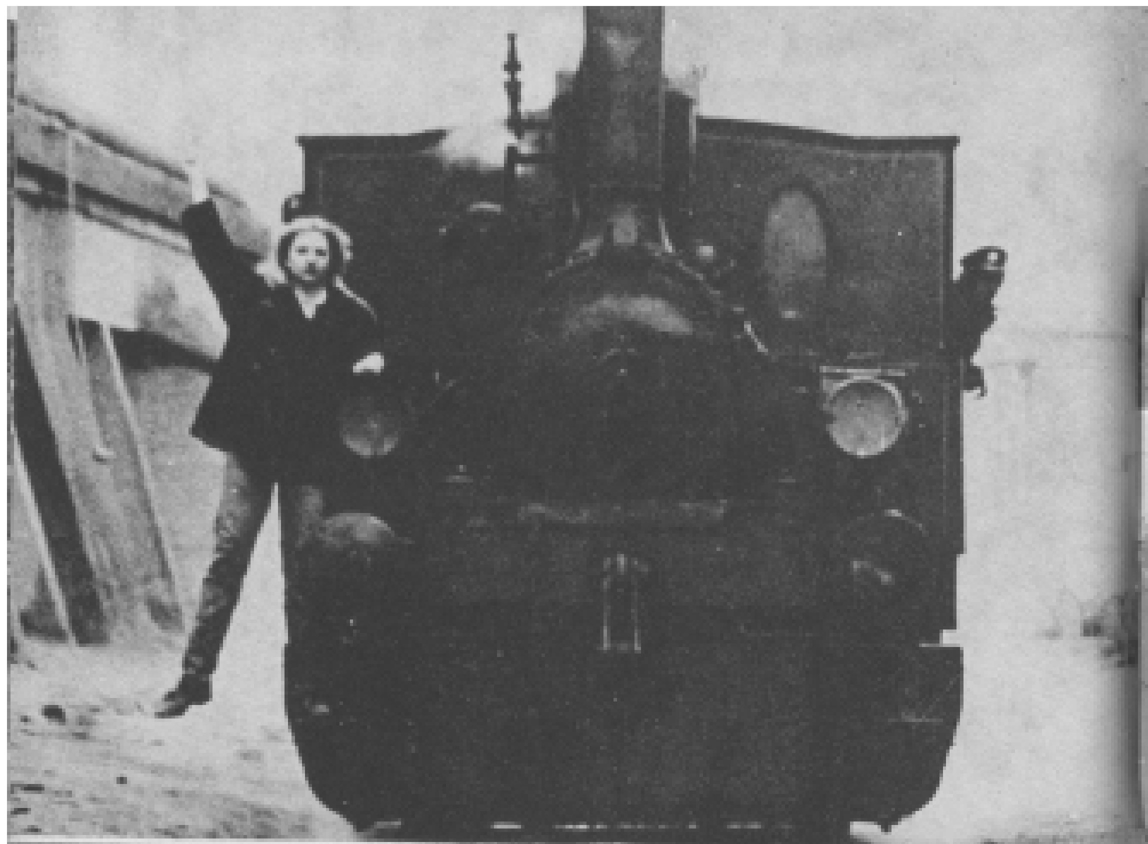

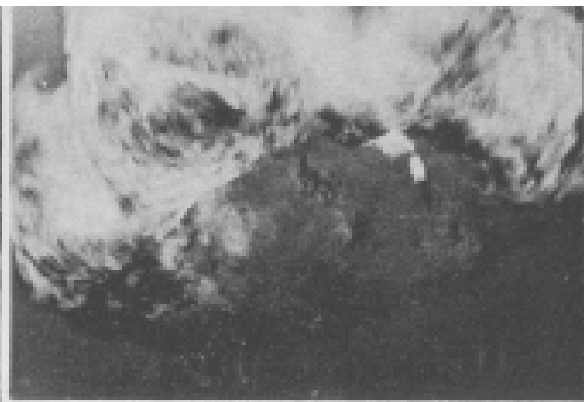

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