

## "Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth": an interview with Goran Radovanović.

Jeanete de Novais Rocha

*Mestranda em Cinema na Universidade da Beira Interior - UBI*

jeanete.rocha@gmail.com

Goran Radovanović is a Serbian director of both feature and documentary films. He was born in Belgrade in 1957 and graduated in art history at Belgrades Faculty of Philosophy in 1982. Between 1977 and 1980 he sojourned in Munich on a scholarship awarded by Goethe Institute. After his return to Belgrade, he worked as a film critic. In 2003 he founded his independent production company "Nama Film". He directed, written and produced several films amongst which *CASTING – A South East Europe Transition Film* and *Chicken Elections*, two documentaries, about the social reality of Serbia, that explore the limits of documentary. These documentaries were distributed all around the world and shown in competition at many major film festivals and received international awards. Actually Goran is a member of the European Film Academy, Berlin and Film Artists Association of Serbia, and teaches film direction at EICTV, San Antonio de los Banos - Cuba. (Excerpts of Goran Radovanović biography extracted from [www.goranradovanovic.com](http://www.goranradovanovic.com)). This interview was conducted by Jeanete de Novais Rocha. The questions were sent by email to Goran Radovanović ([princip@eunet.rs](mailto:princip@eunet.rs)) and received on December 2009.

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**Jeanete de Novais Rocha:** Knowing that its hard to speak in absolutes, could you name some essential qualities that you feel should be present in a work that is labeled as a documentary?

**Goran Radovanović:** It is hard to give any definite answer. Especially after so many "documentary television truths" that came in the second half of the last century. . . . But if we speak about so-called "a creative documentary" - some of essentials are coming out: personal view on the reality and subjective/artistic re-creating the reality!

**JNR:** What kind of ethical problems could the use of reality cause as a background to construct your films?

**GR:** Since I am an artist who wants to tell my artistic truth, there are no ethical problems. In my documentary films I am not trying to tell any other truth but artistic one. That is why I am not afraid to reconstruct and recreate the reality which is far away from the rough reality!

In this sense there are no ethical problems that could appear during the process of documentary filmmaking. Ethical problems could only appear if my artistic manipulation of the reality is bad aesthetic.

**JNR:**Recalling a polish filmmaker, Kieslowsky who did a path contrary to yours (he began in documentary, which he abandoned, and then dedicated exclusively to fictional film) considered documentary as a realm where there are things with forbidden access. Hence its statement "I am frightened of real tears." My question is: do real tears scare you?

**GR:**Yes, a lot! Presenting "the real tears" in a documentary is for me the lowest level of artistic expression. I am repeating: documentary filmmaking for me is the artistic manipulation of the reality! I do not want to show "the real tears"! I want to recreate them! Even if they do not exist in so called "reality"!

**JNR:**When you are telling someone elses story or exploring non-fiction content, how do you approach your research in order not to harm people's integrity?

**GR:**There are thousands ways of approaching the people! But there is no system. The system itself is the director's character. So, the whole story about "ethics in documentary filmmaking" is exclusively connected with this issue. But not in the sense of the question "is the director good or bad person"? But in the sense of the questions "is he good or bad artist" and "what kind of the documentary truth he is capable to create"?

I am establishing the contrary questions: how many times can director "documentary harm" his own actor's integrity during the process of filmmaking? We do not think of this "documentary reality" because in the fiction film we only count the result, not the process itself? Why should not be the same with the documentary filmmaking?! Is documentary filmmaking lower genre than fiction one?!!

**JNR:**How far do you think a documentarist could or should interfere with his subjects?

**GR:**As far as he wants. There are no limits. Process of documentary filmmaking is "digging into unknown and uncertain" without been aware of the end. Highly controlled improvisation! When I say "controlled" – I am thinking on framing, lens, timing, film language, editing style; when I say "improvisation" – I mean": the freedom of creating! For God's sake: subjects are like my actors!

**JNR:**Do you share your power as a filmmaker with your subjects; I mean do you share decision making with your subjects, on the control of the final cut?

**GR:**I want to stress again: I am filmmaker, not a social worker! Editing is the final part of the directing! For God's sake: it is a creating the film language! It has nothing to do with the characters appearing in my documentaries! I never go back to the reality after filming it.

**JNR:**What do you think about paying subjects?

**GR:**It is the way of production, nothing else! I do not see it as an ethical issue.

**JNR:**Do you explain to your subjects the motivations of your film?

**GR:**If they ask, yes. But most of my characters never ask me about my motivations. . . Everything is a matter of confidence. And a matter of emotions and interests. . . But I am sure that they are "scanning" me as well as I am "scanning" them in the process of collaborations. . . The difference is that my "scan" is functional one and another "kind" of theirs. My "scan" is in the purpose of film making. . . My motivation is always to make a good film. And my characters like all humans have a hundreds of different motivations for participating in my films. I do respect their motivations as a human being but not as a filmmaker.

**JNR:** If you are interviewing a person or telling their story, do they influence your image making process? Or do you feel a sense of responsibility to get their feedback along the way?

**GR:** No feed backs at all! I only feel responsibility towards myself.

**JNR:** Documentary films are often conceptualized as having an on going or extra-textual life beyond the initial screening. Do you ever screen your documentaries to your subjects? Why?

**GR:** I never go with my finished films to the community which I filmed! Why? Because the creative documentary is an autonomous work which has nothing to do with the so called documentary reality. I am not mirroring the reality! I am recreating it! This is the huge difference! Like between hyperrealism and the abstract painting! So, the character in "the reality" and the character in the film are not the same one!

**JNR:** You have produced both fiction and non-fiction work. How does audience respond to each genre?

**JNR:** When you index a film as a documentary you are establishing a pact with your audience, who expect an accuracy of the facts. How important is this for you in the creation/production process?

**GR:** It has no importance! A fact itself in my film is not the issue! The issue is what I think about it. Or, how I use it in my story...

**JNR:** Do you stage events in your documentaries?

**GR:** The definition of filmmaking is the manipulation of the issue, subjects, people etc. Of course, it includes the staging as well. To stage an event in a process of documentary filmmaking is just manipulating with the reality and its possibilities. Staging for me means to condense the reality. But I never lie! This is a huge difference.

**JNR:**

When you manipulate certain events in your films, as staging, do you not think that you are breaking the pact that you have established with your audience?

**GR:** There is only one pact between me and audience: the quality of my artistic capability to tell the story.

**JNR:** In documentaries like *Casting* or *Chicken Elections* you add layers of sound that change the meaning of images, sometimes the subjects are presented in a vulnerable position, as the police man in *Casting*. Do you feel comfortable with this manipulation?

**GR:** Of course. As you said: my police man was in vulnerable position! That is exactly what I wanted as director! Changing the image with the sound is the matter of directing in postproduction! Nothing else!

**JNR:** You often use archival material in your documentaries, especially images from television. Do you do this so that you do not have to re-stage events?

**GR:** Mainly I use the archival material in my documentaries to stress the connection between the characters and social/political context. Archival material is always a part of contextualization...

**JNR:** Do you believe, as Picasso, that "art is a lie that makes us realize the truth"?

**GR:** Sure. I think it could be great title for this interview!