



Federation of European
Screen Directors

Fédération Européenne des
Réalisateurs de l'Audiovisuel

TRANSCRIPTION GA Online Series

Session 1 – October 6, 2020

40 Years of FERA: What Makes a European Filmmaker in 2020?

Klemen Dvornik:

Dear all, welcome to FERA general assembly – in a year when we celebrate the 40th anniversary of our organization.

My name is Klemen Dvornik and I'm a film and television director from Slovenia.

I'm also the chair[person] of FERA's board: our federation of european screen directors is a network of 48 organizations as members of 35 countries representing film and television directors at the European level.

This year's general assembly will take place in a virtual environment through three sessions that will take place today and next two Tuesdays. The first two events will be [public] panel discussions and the last one will be formal statutory one.

Here to open our first session titled "what makes a european filmmaker in 2020" is film director and acclaimed actress, former president of FERA, Liv Ullmann.

Liv Ullmann:

What is FERA?

The only federation of European film directors founded in 1980 speaking for more than 20.000 professionals.

We are storytellers.

Kieślowski said about his work – it is difficult to live in an undescribed world. Fellini went further. He wrote about being old, but he said that the sorrow of this as well as [fear] and guilt, all the darkness changed for him to a source for his work, a good source: "Thank you god that I can experience this as a creative person. I think I came to the Earth just to describe this for other people."

How lucky we are, we, members of FERA, we directors of Europe, that we, in more than 40 years, can meet and listen to and reflect on the past and explore what filmmaking means. Reflect today on our own individual vision. Even beyond this virus crisis.

I'm often asked if making movies is a luxury in a world like ours, with so much violence and hunger and innocent victims. And my answer is always no. We know that the images of the movies, the live pictures from the most gifted directors and creators will fill people with a truth and recognition of who we are and why we are.

Rilke said "Go within and scale the depths of your being from which your very life springs forth". Thus we, as storytellers, we must also have great goals so that our profession will never be poorer and flat and empty, without position. We must never forget that this work is one of privilege. What an enormous possibility has been given us. Fellini said "From the day I started my life as a film director, it has for me been the same as making one only film – time has stood still, I feel as if this has been only one and the same day, all the time."

You know that we are the descendants of ancient storytellers who illustrated their tales with rock paintings in caves – the need, the urge to convey something worthwhile about being a human being. To be a storyteller, finding one's way into our fantasy, helping us to see – and not only ourselves. See ourselves as part of this Earth, of the whole universe. See man's inhumanity to man, man's love for man. The films that changed us, the words, the images and those directors that created them.

Once in a Russia, many years ago, Tarkovsky took me to their film archives in Moscow and I sat behind him, behind Tarkovsky, and he turned and smiled to me and when the light dimmed and the wonder of an old film he wanted to show me appeared on the screen, I was brought into the magic of him and an old movie that he loved. I had this master, Tarkovsky, in front of me, who wanted to share what he couldn't say. And the position of his neck and shoulders made it clear that he is watching hard and hungrily, locked in a visual communicating time, with a moving picture before him. This was my only talk with Tarkovsky. But what a talk!

And today I want to thank FERA as the speaker for us, film workers, in front of national and executive authorities like the European Union and the United States, demonstrating the place of culture in our social community. Stating our professional rights and our economic rights, and our importance in political and social questions.

FERA can and will help – assistance and asylum for the children in Greece's Moria camp, support the opposition in Belarus, free imprisoned opposition filmmakers in Russia and Iran. FERA, working for the free cultural film industry, not only as an economically motivated entertainment industry but also for the dignity of the vulnerable. Give the minorities the right of speech and right of equal position.

Rilke wrote "Perhaps everything terrible is in its deepest being something helpless that wants help from us". My memory from 40 years ago, in a desert of Somalia, of refugees and a little boy, 5 years old. He suddenly took my finger, came there close to me, holding onto my fingers and we walked a little while and then he let go of my finger and continued slowly away from me. He was so thin, his behind wrinkly like an old man, and I knew that this little one would soon lie down in the desert sand and die. He has always been with me and that's my story. Nothing that I've ever done has not been part of the impression he gave to me.

We are not witnesses only. We are participants. We filmmakers, storytellers, can make it possible in our often cold, technical and digital world of statistics and quota – to be touched, to recognize there are no "the others" in our world.

On a stone of memory in Hiroshima there is an inscription – we know hundred times more than we need to know what we lack is the ability to be moved from what we see. Listen, understand, hear and believe and share. That's what FERA is about.

Thank you.

Klemen Dvornik:

Now I will open the floor to our panel, welcome to all speakers. I invite our next speaker – my colleague board member British film and television director Bill Anderson, to start today's panel.

Bill Anderson:

Thank you very much, Klemen. It falls on me to welcome and introduce our four panelists today. I'm sure everyone has looked them up on IMDB and found them to be illustrious, prolific, award-winning and multi-talented. As way of introduction, I asked each of them to pick a few films that they were proud of and asked them to say why. And so in no particular order –

Teona Strugar Mitevska, from North Macedonia, chose these films – GOD EXISTS HER NAME IS PETRUNYA she said because it makes me become bankable, the opposite of unbankable, the most horrid and unjust depiction a director could be labeled as. WHEN THE DAY HAD NO NAME because with it I almost ended up in jail – therefore I must have done something right with it to provoke such rage. I AM FROM TITOV VELES because it is a film of pure beauty, imperfect and flawed yet so necessary.

Renaud Bertrand of France chose – SA RAISON D'ETRE was the first miniseries about AIDS in France "I'm proud the project found an audience despite the topic. It was not exactly what people wanted to hear about and it described a reality quite unknown for most people at the time." PRESQUE COMME LES AUTRES is quite the same idea about autism. And THE HOOKUP PLAN was the outsider Netflix series in France and it happened to be the most successful one because it's authentic, simply human.

Isabel Coixet of Spain chose – a few films THINGS I NEVER TOLD YOU, MY LIFE WITHOUT ME and THE SECRET LIFE OF WORDS, THE BOOKSHOP, and her HBO series FOODIE LOVE – and of all these projects she said "I'm proud I fought to write and direct and produce these projects exactly like I wanted them. I'm proud I didn't listen to people saying there is no audience for these stories. I guess I'm proud to be really stubborn."

James Hawes from the UK picked out CHALLENGER DISASTER because with a tiny budget it was a hugely ambitious story and film, an untold story and he managed to land a massive cast for an American story all filmed in Johannesburg, South Africa. BLACK MIRROR HATED IN THE NATION was from a hit show but it was its first feature-length ever and he was very proud of having managed the tone of a heightened thriller, both in performances and complex CGI, and making something science fiction that was noire-esque. And finally the DOCTOR WHO CHRISTMAS SPECIAL, a UK institution – James launched David Tennant as the new Doctor Who and it was a huge popular success, massive audience satisfaction on Christmas day – he had to persuade the Queen to allow him to film on the roof of the Tower of London.

Birgitte Stærmose:

Thank you, Bill. Just a few words about my wish that this discussion will have as an informal quality as it can despite this format, and why at FERA we decided to do this panel. We've had a lot of discussions both in our national guilds and also in the board of FERA about the invisibility of the essence of our work. What Liv talked about very beautifully. It's something that we are not very good at talking about normally and feel that it can be ignored and I think in the last half year we were reminded when we started talking about the pressures that COVID-19 could bring to us, that we thought immediately our space could get diminished further. So we decided to attempt to speak of the unspeakable.

Our panelists are going to talk twice and after that we will have time for questions from Bill and I as well as from everybody attending the session.

We'd like to get our panelists to speak about this mysterious space, the creative space of the director, and we have on purpose picked four very different directors from different regions of Europe, with very different experiences, because we don't believe that a director is one thing. It's a very personal thing – how you work, so how can we introduce concepts about the creative space without putting people in a box they don't belong into? I've asked the panelists to come up with three words that describe their creative space and talk about each and why they picked it.

Isabel, will you go first?

Isabel Coixet:

The three words that I identified as really important for me – Calm, Freedom and Intimacy.

Calm – I think the paradox of our work is we create – in terms of I'm a writer director so sometimes when I talk about making films I talk about writing and directing – but I think you are fed by the true movement of life. You need – at least I need – chaos in order to create but in the moment I have to make my vision in a film, on a set, I really need some calm and I really need to know or to feel or know/feel why, who I am in relationship with what I want to say, what I want to shoot, what I want to film but in a way this calm is very important for me. I'm talking about precision, a very strange serenity that I'm able to obtain when you have 60 people around you trying to light, move sets, make up etc – these things, this space which belongs to you is – all these people are here to work with me in this thing but I need to be serene, I cannot – I always say to people in film schools you have to come to the set leaving your tears, anxieties, your alcohol intake etc outside.

Intimacy – that's my landscape. I work with intimacy. I'm never more happy than when I am with one actor, two actors in a room and there's nobody there and I'm carrying the camera and I leave them some kind of freedom. And there are problems, little things, and they move and I follow them – that's when I'm happier.

And Freedom – I guess freedom and democracy are concepts that can mean very contradictory things, but for me freedom is in my head. Freedom is – no matter how the budget is, no matter what the – someone, like some sales agent is saying, no matter what the platform or people when you work for TV – no matter what they say, I have to know this is my choice, this is the only freedom I have and know how to use it.

And more or less that's what I think about my work. Liv said all the things we know and we worship and that's why we are making films so I guess I'm trying to be very specific and concrete now.

Birgitte Stærmosé:

Thank you so much Isabel, that was beautiful. I'm going to leave your words uncommented and give the word to James.

James Hawes:

Well, the first three words I came up with Birgitte didn't like because I wanted to say Chocolate, Rioja and Week-ends, but apparently that wasn't serious enough. I've had a re-think and actually in a different way I'm going to say very similar things than Isabel – everything you just said chimes utterly with me.

You find me now sat at in production office, I've just spent all these hours next door, and I was aware I was coming into this meeting and it felt very live to be remembering these words and the first one I want to use is Trust.

I need Trust. I can't take a project unless I trust the script. I can't take a project unless I've made an assessment of the creative environment. Is this production company going to give me the wherewithal and that's not necessarily about money and resources, but are they going to give me the support and the oxygen to make the film I believe it should be or the episode I believe it should be? Can I trust their intent? And if that sounds cynical and suspicious perhaps that's because directors are the damaged beings we've become and you get to a certain point and you need to know you're traveling with a team.

I also want trust in the eventual destination will this studio or this streamer market this program and film will it get seen when I donate a little piece of my life and passion into this project have they got the wherewithal and the enthusiasm to make sure my story finds an audience? And I need to trust that.

But I also need trust coming the other way. I need trust put in me and and to be allowed the freedom to go and make some of my decisions.

Isabel I'm looking at notes – I feel embarrassed that you spoke so fluently but I have some cues here.

I've had recent experiences with US networks where they micromanage, where I don't think it's personal to me, I think it's systemic. And very quickly, in making your next decision with your creatives, it's very difficult to avoid double guessing what the next answer would be.

So you need to get to a place as far as possible where trust is put in you and they let you go away to make your decisions and to make your mistakes along the way. So trust is a huge thing.

Sellotape Time. I know it's technically two words so I'm breaking the rules again but – once upon a time we edited on film and you made your choice about where the cut was going to be and there was that magical moment when the editor turned to the splicing machine and the audio was pulled out of the steam back and in that moment the director could turn away and you could think about the consequence of the cut you just made, you could think about what was coming next.

I don't want to sound old-fashioned like a luddite but the digital world demands everything to happen now and I think a director [creative] space [requires that] you have to create sellotape time.

I mean it during pre-production and I mean it on set – the nature of the speed, especially on high-end TV productions these days, is that you're expected to make a decision and stick to that decision – and if you don't, then there are consequences. How do we turn this around?

On set, you very rarely have time to think between scenes – the pressure is 'okay we finish that scene we call that shot here are the actors already waiting for the next scene' – they're brought on and you don't have time even to reposition your head, so however prepared you are, you need to create the thinking time.

Isabel, I think again you touched on this.

I had one occasion where a producer said to me 'what are you doing? If you take five minutes between each scene and we shoot seven scenes a day, that's 45 minutes we wasted.' And we had quite a discussion about my belief that it wasn't wasted time – that was me making sure that the actors were going to be poised, that I was going to get my notes right, that the edit would flow smoothly and frankly they'd have a better show at the end.

So I now work to carve out sellotape time even if I have to fight for it and argue for it on a given day.

Then the third thing is a bit of a contradiction to all this – it's Friction.

I sat in this room next door in the middle of this production and realized that I need people to argue with me. It may come in many forms but friction is a way to light a fire – it sometimes it can be about the choice of project. A couple of you talked about films you were proud of because there were things you felt important to tell or that made you angry.

Anger is a great place to start to tell a story, to create fiction and if it's a story you feel where somebody's being wronged.

This is a confession, guys – I find anger sometimes when with the line producer when the budget is cut, I find anger sometimes when my schedule is reduced.

Finding that friction, finding a battle, finding my antagonist within either the script or the production environment to kick my ass and fuel me to give me some sort of additional energy and need to tell the story.

And of course there's positive friction – there's that friction when you've been given freedom to choose the very best people to work alongside you, whether it's the writer I've just been sitting in a room with, a DP, a designer producer first assistant – and they challenge you they ask you questions – 'do the answers yet?' And that friction gives you a whole new idea.

I can sit at home for as long as I like trying to be brilliant, it's nothing to what happens when you're under the cosh in the moment having to answer the questions right there and then.

So I think those are my three – challenge/confront, create friction/ sellotape time/ trust – there you go.

Birgitte Stærmose:

Thank you so much, James, that's great. The next person that I would like to give the word to is Renaud.

Renaud Bertrand:

Thank you very much for asking me to talk – well which is not the thing I love the most in my job as it happens. When Birgitte asked me to talk about these words, really my idea was to talk more about the personal way I would I would make and create my creative space.

So that my three words are Desire, Genuine and Trust.

The paradox is that two of these words are, in my view, talking about irrational ideas because desire is irrational and for me desire is the most important thing. The most important reason to be involved in a project – so do I want to be involved, like you said, for so many years, so many months in a project for irrational reasons and the answer is yes. That's what fascinates me in this word and in this job.

The first question I have to ask myself when I join and jump into a project is – do I really have this desire to tell this story, and this irrational pulsion to do it. Will this desire stay all along the project? It's the same thing at every level of choices that I make to do my job.

Desire is the most important engine for me, when I decide to go along on a project: without it, I don't see anything – and with desire, I see images, I see colors, I hear voices, I see movement, I see flow, I see bodies and I see a movie.

So desire is also a belief that something bigger than myself – my reasoning, my fears, my doubts – is going to be stronger and will make me able to go to the bottom of what I want to do. Because I am very vulnerable, and I know there will be many obstacles when I do a movie, like you said James, we have producers, we have networks to handle. But my desire at the end will be the strongest thing that will take me to the end of the project.

What I like also in desire is that it is very mysterious – and this mystery keeps me awake and focused.

The second word is Genuine – because like you all said, we have a very new situation with our job: we now have many people involved in our choices, we're not as free as in the past. When I was an assistant, I lived this time where directors had more power but right now, we have a number of parameters that make our job very different so we have to compromise. Yet the fact that I want to stay genuine is one the most important goal in the way I can see my future.

Am I genuine with myself? Am I genuine when I choose each project? Am I genuine with my intention? What's my purpose? Do I want to produce a sensation? For what reason? Am I faithful to my vision, to my

purpose? Am I doing a fantasy choice how can I make a project special? Is my vision making this project strong, good?

Every day's choice matters. So if I'm not genuine there is no chance that what I'm doing is going to be special, particular. My vision is going to be somewhere in a movie so being genuine is the only way for me to be focused on my vision and the only chance to give something special to a project.

Am I genuine with others too, that's also a question I have to ask myself every day when I'm working.

The third word is exactly the same as you said, James, it's Trust. For me trust is not something rational, it's not something reasonable. We've got so many obstacles [to overcome] when we direct something – when we write, when you have to convince people about the project.

For me trust is an irrational force that makes me able to [get to the finish line, to achieve] my goal. It protects me from having conflict with myself. It doesn't produce solutions, but trust works for me: when I'm in a conflict, when I am in a situation where I have to adapt/adjust what I'm doing, trust means that I know there's a solution, a very tiny little space where I can go on. Because I've had the experience of it before, trust keeps me hopeful.

These three words, these three ideas in fact gave me in the past the opportunity to have freedom, to be myself and to be able to be the better – to be the best version of myself when I'm working.

Thank you.

Birgitte Stærmose:

Thank you so much, Renaud. And lastly, Teona, it's your turn.

Teona Strugar Mitevska:

For me the three words are Tenacity, Hutzpah – which is Audacity, and Girl.

Tenacity – when I started making films 18-19 years ago, I found myself in a situation where this creative space was not so available to a person like myself – a girl, a woman. I very quickly learned that I must find alternative ways to reach my goal or to create a space where my voice can be heard.

And I decided to basically knock on every door, hoping that after a hundred closed doors, one door will open and somebody will give me a hand – I'm sorry I'm also looking at my notes.

So I guess this Tenacity it is also about persistence, and also about being stubborn – something Isabel talked about, stubbornness. I am very stubborn because of the conditions and the place where I make my films, and I've been known to, well, hit my head straight against the wall until the wall disappears. Maybe this makes me a fool, I'm very well aware of it, but it is the only way I can react to injustices that I feel.

The second word – Hutzpah, Audacity. You might not agree with something somebody says or does or how they do it, but you might admire their audacity, their hutzpah.

As I said, injustice it is the basis, the core of every story I tell, every film I make and I just simply cannot do otherwise. It is this need to react and to express myself – it's stronger than something I can control.

But having this métier, being a film director, being a storyteller, having the platform of being hurt and making films, brings with itself a big amount of responsibility. Within this ability lies the influence we might have, with the stories we tell and the points we are trying to make. And for this I guess one needs sacrifice courage and audacity. For me being a filmmaker, it is like being an activist and today more than ever before.

Third word – Girl. I don't like this word – I don't like the way it's used, especially in french society, I cannot handle when people call a mature woman like myself “fille”, girl – but I'm not talking about this here, I'm talking about girl as a child.

I was not a tomboy as a child, I was actually a girly girl. I think I'm more a tomboy today than I ever was then. Anyway, my point is there is such a beauty and such a freedom in the play/games of children, in the space of children.

I love this freedom and this creativity, I love thinking out of the box, I love dreaming of the impossible. I love Peter Pan.

I must sound a little bit stupid but I consider myself a Peter Pan – I try to stay this Peter Pan, it is a way to protect myself in my creative space and to do what I want to do.

I will just add something – coming from the balkans where the film industry it's really not a commercial enterprise, I mean the film art is not an industry. I think, after listening to you, in a way perhaps I do have a certain level of leadership that maybe in other parts of the world it's diminishing. So I guess being non-commercial also unfortunately means freedom.

So that's it!

Birgitte Stærmose:

Thank you very much Teona, it's great.

A lot of things we could talk about but maybe people will come back to it with questions later. I think it's kind of nice to leave your spaces undisturbed by too much discussion because I think you shared a lot of a lot of unique perspective that also felt very familiar [to me] and very much similar even though it's very individual/personal.

I would like to move on to the next part of the panel. I've asked each of the panel participants to think and prepare to speak a bit about how they look at the future.

Listening to Liv's speech, I was really reminded – I really sat there with, it might just be me but, some sense of loss because she talks about film art in this very pure way that I'm not sure any of us can afford in the future. I think we're entering a phase of filmmaking which is more complicated – she said Fellini said he came to earth to describe this for other people. It's a very simple, god-like position that I'm not sure [is still possible]. If I do my next film and say, well, I'm here to describe what I see to other people – that people will say 'okay go right ahead!'

But at the same time I do believe in what Liv also talked about this storyteller principle – she referred to Kieślowski I think, saying that we're here to describe because we can't live in an undescribed world, we need for the world to be told, as human beings. I do believe in the purity of that.

So what I've asked the panelists to talk about is two things about this future which is a little more compromised than maybe what Liv talked about. One is what is ahead of us, what are the possibilities of the future that we're going to operate in as directors, and what are the challenges. What may be lost or what do we need to preserve?

You each come from different perspectives so I also expect [interventions] to be quite different but hopefully enlightening. Isabel, would you like to start off again?

Isabel Coixet:

I have to say I thought a lot about what you asked me the other day – how I see the future. It's very difficult to see the future now, because lots of things are happening on the short term. To be very specific – I did a film and it's going to open next month. The discussion I was having today was about is it worth it to put

it in movie theaters in Spain next month, shall we wait until next year, the movie theaters in some parts of Spain are closed, what is better for the film. And I said to the production company – which is the same production company as Pedro Almodóvar – you choose, I really don't know, I'm like surrounded by a fog. I don't know if it's better to do it now, at the same time I think what if next year is even worse?

When you wake up in the first thing you see in the morning is Cineworld, the cinema theaters chain, closing, and you ask yourself – I did a feature film, what's going to be the future of this film? I was so worried this morning, so I really don't know what to say.

This activism Teona was talking about, I don't know how to handle it right now.

During this meeting this morning, they were talking also about options like going to pay-per-view, and releasing it in television too. When I work for Netflix or HBO, it's okay since it's something I know is going to be seen on a little screen. This time, I thought – this is a film, it has to be seen in a movie theater at least for a while, to give it like the right dimension. I guess I'm too I'm too worried right now to answer properly what you ask me.

I've also seen things – I don't know if it is the right moment in the panel to talk about this, but I've seen things lately regarding the role of the director which are really worrying me.

There is a project right now shown on TV broadcaster in Spain which is very popular, but the two directors who did it are credited in the in the credits, but nobody is giving them the credit in doing it. The only thing people are talking about is the creator or the showrunner or whatever you're calling it – I think this figure of the showrunner is really... I'm sorry I think I'm very negative today, but there are things worrying me a lot.

Like the algorithm – this famous algorithm, when you go to Netflix or HBO or even other platforms which are more curated and interesting. This is something I'm strongly against, I think it is preventing people from discovering things which, maybe they're not used to or drawn to, but that it could be interesting to discover. A Macedonian film for example, or something you never know you liked because you didn't know it even existed.

I think I'm very pessimistic, I'm sorry – I was I was trying to be positive, and I prepared a list but instead I have a list of horrible things.

Birgitte Stærmose:

Well, it's really okay because I know James really would like to speak about the positive side, so we'll put him on now.

James Hawes:

Oh but Isabel, I understand that pain and I know a lot of it. Obviously my position is slightly different in that my experience and work is uniquely television and I'm not having to look for a big screen distribution, but nothing you've said doesn't chime with me.

Like you, I'm going to try and park COVID-19 for the moment, at least for the next 12 months or so we have of production problems and distribution challenges, because I think there's an opportunity to talk about it. I'm going to be controversial and more upbeat than many of you are. I feel quite angrily that we should be.

We have to talk a bit about where we are, and the role of the director, I think that's useful. I've written all these notes – Birgitte, you may have to bring me back on point because I've just thrown them aside and this is going to become a bit more organic.

In the last few years, I've worked for major American networks, I have worked doing single films, I have worked as an episodic director under a showrunner, and I have worked as a producing director – I'm not sure if that's a concept that's known about widely but I think it's something we should talk about.

My first bit of positivism is – although I don't come from a European feature film background, the British tradition is that a television director will be there at the beginning and they will be there at the last mixing of the last beat of the closing music. And whether it was making a five-minute film at the BBC or a 90-minute film for Netflix, that's what you've done, so you are the author, you understand it like a mini-movie or a TV movie.

When European directors – and some of you have this experience – turn up for a television network in the states, and you offer that amount of interest and passion and forensic attention to detail, they're blown away because an awful lot of the American tradition is to hire somebody and collect some shots, collect some performances, give them two days in the cutting room and go home.

Obviously the network is partly to blame, but a lot of American directors have got used to that and I think European directors have a huge amount to be proud of and to make part of our selling point that we can bring ourselves as total filmmakers to all platforms, and we shouldn't forget that.

Now I can talk about negative experiences where I've gone in, and the showrunner, who was also the writer and the director, gave a leading Hollywood director who I won't name 20 days to do the opening episode, and we got eight days, where he came on the tech recce, asked me where the wide shot was from, and he told me 'no no it's going to be from over there' and the height of the lens was prescribed and we had barely two days in the edit remotely – how can you direct or tell your story this way? Of course you can't.

I've worked alongside show runners who go 'look, I don't know about the onset stuff, that's why you're here – be my right hand showrunner, work alongside me' and you get a level of trust that can be fantastic if the collaboration works well with the individual – this is why I wouldn't condemn showrunning per se.

But I think, and this is something I'll come back to at the end, I think it is the role of the director on the individual occasion, show by show, and on a bigger occasion we talked about recognition for the director. I think we have a duty – Directors UK, FERA, whoever – to assert the role of a director, to get that credit recognized, to make sure that people understand.

We have perhaps been partly the authors of our own disappearance. We talk about our magic and what we do, we operate as lone guns, we are very rarely a team and I still get asked the question more than anything else: what is the difference between a director and a producer? People don't understand. I think we have a job to advertise ourselves better.

I have been recently lead director on a big series for TNT and Netflix. That was a really satisfying authorial role. I was involved in the script, I built the sets and the cast from the ground up. On that occasion, the writer-showrunner was happier to be in LA than in Vancouver – that suited us both best. There was trust, I had plenty of sellotape time because there was no one in my face, and we were able to build something. I guess as a lead director I was given the resources and the time.

Let me touch on producing director – can I just ask if any of you on the panel know about the producing director role in any detail? This is a relatively new concept and I want to say that I think it's a sign of a positive recognition that they need us.

It's hiring usually the lead director – and this was my case, I did directed episodes one, nine and ten of a series, I was there also with the status of executive producer, I was there for the duration of the production, I was involved in hiring the other directors – negotiating with the other directors about what our shooting style was, leaving them some room to be authors but also trying to maintain a series style. That's a difficult thing to do. But it was what the network and the producers wanted, they wanted another director being, another director brain on the production, as an author, and they're recognizing that the

showrunner can't do it all, doesn't understand it all, doesn't have all those skills and I think that recognition is something we should be aware of and should look to trade upon.

Now you see I've just lost my thought – what was the next thing I was going to say? Stories. What COVID has done positively is turned people to their small screens, admittedly their small screens, Isabel, but there is a hunger for story.

Now I felt there was a huge change in international television consumption when dothraki became recognized as a language. For those of you who didn't watch Game of Thrones, dothraki is a fictional mythic language that goes through all eight seasons and is used by one entire storyline and is subtitled. It's like having a huge hit series where nobody speaks anything but klingon or some other alien language. There was huge fear that people would turn off and instead people bought into this other language. And now we see more and more subtitled pieces, and we see Parasite at the Oscars – it's an obvious example but one we should talk about. I am seeing shows on Netflix that might be in Yiddish or they might be in Spanish – there is a much broader willingness to hear stories of universal scope from corners of the world.

I have one particular project that is just getting traction which I couldn't get off the ground in the UK for various reasons. Partly it's too political and it's going to make a lot of people angry, secondly it needs a big budget, thirdly it didn't fit in a single movie format – it runs over years, it needs a mini-series.

Before the streamers, there wasn't really a home for it, now there is and there's the budget and it happens to hit a genre moment. So I think as storytellers – and my god everything Liv said strikes me in the core and the soul – we have that responsibility, I really want to argue that I think we have that opportunity. Yes, it needs to be commercial, yes we probably have to present our projects in a different way and sure, there are going to be moments where we can't make it the way we want to make it. But I think there is a growing willingness, if we see this everything's changing, we're going to lose some stuff and we can sit here and mourn it, and hurt for it and I do for some of the freedoms I had before – or we can say okay, there's an opening for things changing. Revolution is a time for somebody to stand on the top of the barricade and say 'I can see a new horizon, I want to stand on that horizon, I want to make it mine'.

I really think there is an opportunity for us and a duty for us to say what these sorts of projects could be, to explain the role of the director, to get involved with the networks about how the relationship with the showrunner should be, to have conversations with the DGA and the European directing guilds much more actively, so we don't become in Europe a cheap production house for american networks, there are ways to do that.

And also yes, one warning – there are some UK productions that are starting to go 'hey we like this American model, maybe we can use the directors for as little as possible time' but I do think we've come a way. There's a point when – which Bill will remember as well – where there was a head of drama at the BBC who was quoted in the national press as saying 'directors fuck up a good script, they're only really good for collecting camera shots' – camera pushers, he called them in print. And we were for a decade and a half parked, marginalized by one or two of the heads of the big networks here.

That has changed. Shows do not get green lit here until an approved director with a vision has pitched to a network very often. Not everything but for high-end TV that is certainly the case. So begrudgingly they sort of understand they need us. I think we have a responsibility to keep explaining, and not to be too defeated, Isabel, though I understand completely your pain, I don't want to diminish that for a moment. But to say okay we take the ground – this is what the future could be like.

I'll shut up now.

Birgitte Stærmose:

Thank you so much, James. Teona, I'm going to go to you now if that's okay – just to to to break the pattern here a little bit.

Teona Strugar Mitevska:

Well I will react to James – it is very beautiful what you're describing, this opportunity to open doors, to diversity. I just can't wait for these doors to be open to my part of the world because I'm not only able – I'm very much eager and willing to enter into this, to do a series. I think this possibly positive change must include the rest of the world, and I hope this will come.

I never had any experience of this where I come from, although I did go to NYU grad, an American school. I am not familiar with the system of showrunner and technical director. Last summer, in my production company Sisters and Brother Mitevski, that we have with my sister, we actually hosted a Netflix show – Into the Night, a Belgium series – and it was an incredible experience because we could see how this system works.

Basically, there was a showrunner and there were two directors which were only collectors. It was very shocking – I was very excited at watching how things are done, the efficiency of it, etc, but I tried to project myself in [their] position and I said to myself – if I had to do this, I would die. I have to stay a creator and not a collector, so this is something that we must fight for. As you say, James. I think if I believe your word – and I do believe your word – it is something that the industry has understood.

Art cinema is this intellectual stimulation of the spirit/mind and it will always stay around, even if sometimes when we talk about and think about the future, we are very much concerned about holding our position. I think a certain level of openness is needed: we must adapt and do the best we can. The idea is really to continue telling stories the best way we can, and to have this space in television, in new forms of cinema etc etc.

The COVID crisis – I spent it in Macedonia in a house with my family. I'm actually in pre-production for a film that I'm supposed to shoot in few months, but it is very difficult since I'm shooting in the Balkans and I live in Belgium – between quarantine and the prices of tickets which has skyrocketed, it has become really a real defeat, a struggle to actually set up this project. Which doesn't mean that we will not do it – but it is not evident as it was before. My fear is that what is happening now will open the option to closing borders and not keeping them open. I hope once we get out of this crisis, borders will open again because this is really difficult – the need to freely move is also essential, just as the need to express [yourself freely].

This being said, I will share with you a positive experience from this crisis: as a filmmaker, I usually make a film with 30, 50 people on set – and then I had to do something so I said okay, I will shoot. And I made a film – it is an hour and a half, I did it with my camera only – maybe it's a récit, maybe it is a reflection, but actually it does have the form of a film and what I learned from it is that this crisis can make us enforce this idea of the need to adapt. If tomorrow I don't have the means to make films as I have made them until now, I will adapt and I will continue being a storyteller differently. I will persist.

Birgitte Stærmosse:

Thank you so much, Teona, that was beautiful. Renaud, the floor is yours.

Renaud Bertrand:

I would like to start this one with an optimistic reflection. Here in France during and after the confinement period, platform of course increased their audience – many people who were watching broadcasting networks and had no clue about platforms have started to watch movies and series on them.

The result of that is that right now, we can see that very low-quality programming on broadcasting networks doesn't work anymore. It means the audience is now used to better quality and that's one of the positive result of what happened.

I discovered TV in England where I was learning English in a very modest family, and I thought wow! I was watching the BBC etc and it made me want to become a TV director after seeing these feature films. I decided to become a director for TV – because I had this idea that the quality of TV programming could be increased in France. That was a big fight in fact, because at the beginning, when you were trying to do quality, people wouldn't understand. The network would say – why do you want to do that? Because if lower quality works, why bother. For me this is important and quite positive in a way – maybe that's the only good thing about what's happening now.

About the role of the director in the industry now – of course, it's very common to say that our role has been diminishing through the years, and I can tell that with platform and with networks, yes, often people expect from us to just do the work, [collect shots] and nothing else.

So what the future be for me in this situation? Either I become a showrunner and writer, which is what I'm doing on the series that I'm developing right now with a platform, but I'm a director – what I prefer to do is to direct, for me writing is very painful, so I want to continue working on projects so what can be the solution for me?

On this Netflix show, at the beginning my part was very defined as a director, but I created complicity with the showrunner, with the writers, and it became a happy wedding – an unexpected, but very happy wedding between creators – and in fact I was really involved throughout the process – casting, location scouting etc.

On the series I'm just about to finish now, it's exactly the same thing – they wanted me for a reason but we had never worked together and the fact that we got along, with the writers and the showrunners, they liked the rushes and again, this complicity was very efficient and for the next season, if I agree to do it, it will be very different and I will have more responsibility from the beginning – because they trust me.

I don't know if it's specific to France, but I think the situation today is also a consequence of what the situation was when I was assistant – for example in Cannes, the name of the director was always mentioned but you never knew who was the scriptwriter. I think the time has come for the revenge of the writers and I can understand it in a way, because for so long they have been not considered as they should have been.

In France, there's a very recurrent big fight between scriptwriters and directors, and one of the only thing I'm focused on in my action with our professional organisations, is to try to put them together again – to make peace with writers because there's no reason why we should work in frustration, in domination, in power games, in blackmailing. I have seen situations where the director says to the writer 'okay, if you don't let me do what I want, I will ask this actor not to do this seriously'. That is so unproductive – for me, one of the most important solution is to make peace with the writers and to have everybody being loyal in this collaboration.

Of course, it's very complicated to set rules, because now the rule is really that the showrunners have the power. I've also been often in a producer-director position, it is happening here as well. It means that something is progressing in this direction – I really believe in that and in that kind of reunification between us.

What can be lost? Many things can be lost – but the thing that will never be lost, that they will always need from us, is our creativity. Because even if they want to have power on everything, they will always need something creative to make the project a little bit better than what it would be if they were taking care of it. Even though sometimes, in some situations, I'm not imposing my creativity the usual way, there's always a way – which is more complicated to find – such as unity with actors etc.

Regarding COVID – I've been shooting under COVID, we just started to shoot right after the confinement period. Everybody was making a big deal about it all – my way to handle it is to propose to take rational options. The actors were confined in an apartment, and the crew and everybody was very responsible, nobody got sick and we did the show completely normally – we had sex scenes, we did everything we would have done in normal circumstances. Here too, it's a matter of trust.

The last thing I want to say is – maybe rather than writing and directing, or setting up new rules, the best is when weddings are love weddings. But hate weddings produced a terrible situation and maybe there should be somebody that ensures to put the right people together – the right director with right showrunner. Maybe people should have the chance to know each other better. If the present situation cannot be avoided, maybe it can be made more sweet. Voila, that's all I have, friends.

Birgitte Stærmose:

Thank you, Renaud.

I just want to sum up a couple of things that I've heard in order to jump the discussion forward. One question that I had for you, which you've already answered I think, is – do you experience that you have the mandate or the power that matches your artistic responsibility as a director? And the answer is no, based on what you've said, so we can skip that question.

Another one is – is the mandate or the power of the director clear enough? When I listen to all of you I have to say no – or project by project – but it seems not clear enough.

I think I can conclude on behalf of all of you – and you can interrupt me if you disagree – that the sort of god-given right that Liv Ullman described for us earlier is severely challenged, we're no longer put on earth to describe the lives of other people in order for them to understand it better. That is what I'm hearing when you speak.

Listening to you, Teona, it seems European cultural diversity is being severely challenged also. There are areas where we can get right into the game of what's going on globally, and areas where we cannot, the option is not really there. So it's not up to our own industriousness – no matter how imaginative we are. That's also something to discuss.

Then Renaud you mentioned, and I recognize it and others in my guild will recognize this as well – the revenge of the writer. The person who never was allowed to speak, all of a sudden speaks and therefore just does not want to be interrupted. It's definitely something that can be felt.

Another thing that I'm hearing – what did Liv said, she said talked about the privilege to speak and to be European – but at the same time, there is a lack of inclusivity, and as Europeans we must talk about it.

I think we are in a sort of gray zone of being artistic directors wanting to tell stories, and having a barrier of being one-man bands up against bigger and bigger systems. How do we get out of this sort of artistic gray zone, which we have to live in? Renaud, you said the one thing we can't lose and that nobody can take away from us is our creativity – so it's a strength that we have, but it's also something that leaves us in a gray zone.

How can we become an instrumental part of the change in the future? And how can we influence each other?

The first concrete question I'd like to put to you is about the producing director figure mentioned first by James, and I know Teona you are also involved in a production company with your sister to produce your own films.

One thing is to work with, let's say a streaming platform, you become an executive producer and of course you can enter the room where the executive decisions are made and can't get kicked out, right, they have

to keep you in the playground. But of course once you're in that room, you are also in the role of an executive producer – so there's a dilemma there. James, do you want to go first?

James Hawes:

I think we're talking about different producer directors. What I'm talking about is – you're hired essentially as a director to a project that you didn't necessarily originate, and you are there to oversee a lot of the visualization of the project, and to manage its realization from page to screen. They recognize that the director has visual skills – how to choose the costumes, how to manage the art department, how often to negotiate the script with the actors – and they want you there as a creating managing executive. You are very much in the room, you are very included.

I would say that this is something of, as you rightly say, Birgitte, a double-edged sword. It is a Jekyll and Hyde kind of existence, because on the one hand you want to support all the creatives, on the other hand suddenly you become the executive and you need to talk about the budget and the schedule and you're having to talk to other directors and manage them down, in a way that would be anathema to you as the creative. So it is asking you to have a schizophrenic personality.

The other thing is – it is utterly exhausting. I mean on a practical level, my average day was 17 and a half hours, and it was seven days a week for nearly eight months. It is a life shortening experience, so I think it has to be thought of in a different way – partly because productions recognize what the director can bring, they put a lot on your shoulders. It is different to what I think Teona is thinking of in terms of producer director.

Teona Strugar Mitevska:

Well yes it's different. We have a production company, my sister is the producer but the reason why we created it was really because we did not have another choice.

Basically when I finished film school, I returned to Macedonia and I was taken for a fool, like 'what do you want, you're a woman, you're a girl' etc. So it was very difficult in that environment – in the Balkans, 20-18 years ago years ago – for us to to be taken seriously. So we discovered that the only way we can survive in this kind of environment is if we are two. And now three with our brother. We created the production company so we can make the films, just make the films, and later it became something about protecting our creative space, having control of what is put out there.

James, you talk about Jekyll and Hyde – now we co-produce other filmmakers, and as a co-producer you don't have so much control, you just hope to land a good project that is interesting for the world to see. But what I have learned from having my production company – I actually have become very efficient, I know how to manage my time. I'm a director that now always finishes four days or a week before schedule. I prepare so much that I'm actually very, very efficient in the way I shoot, and the way I manage my time.

I guess this also comes from knowing that actually, it is yourself on the line and the film needs to be finished, and the budget is a certain amount that you have to fit into.

Isabel Coixet:

I'm another kind of producer director.

Seven years ago, they offered me to direct one or two episodes of [House of Cards]. I wasn't crazy about it but I thought – maybe this is a good experience, these actors are very good, the scripts are good. The first meeting we had, I realized I was going to be miserable doing it. For every little thing I was thinking about to improve things, even little things about Kevin Spacey's wardrobe, all these executives were

looking at me like I was crazy. So I left that that room and I said to my agent – listen, that was a good idea but I die if I do that.

That's why, when I worked for HBO, I realized the only way to really manage what I wanted was writing the eight episodes, shooting the eight episodes in Japan, France, Rome and Spain, and producing them, so my company produced them.

For me, there was no Jekyll and Hyde situation. Jekyll and Hyde were of the same mind, and it was a great experience. I was able to take decisions such as – we're gonna buy the rights of 10 songs I love and we're going to use them in all the episodes, and if I wouldn't part of the budget, I would reallocate it to things who really matters for me.

I know probably the rest of you will not agree with me – one of the things I say when I go to a film school to do some masterclass to future film directors, is – learn to write because that will give you a lot of freedom. You will skip one part of the process, and I think it's good advice, at least for me – when many years ago, Robert Altman told me that, I didn't really understand but then when I started making films, I did. It's a lot of work – seventeen hours a day, yes but people working in mines work a lot too and it's not as rewarding [Laughter].

Birgitte Stærmose:

Bill, I'm looking at the clock and we have half an hour left – the attendees should be allowed to ask questions of our panelists.

Bill Anderson:

Absolutely. One of the things that struck me – Renaud talked about the marriage of hate, and that there should be someone who could put together a writer and a director. That used to be the producer – the creative triangle of the writer-producer-director, and I wonder whether part of the problem about people not understanding what we do as directors is part of a slightly wider problem of a lot of people in power not understanding what goes on on set at all. The old-fashioned producer was somebody who was Jekyll to your Hyde or Hyde to your Jekyll – who understood about money, but knew also about creativity – then Isabel enjoyed 17 and a half hour days, but maybe James, what you were feeling was that you were doing two distinct jobs with two distinct responsibilities.

James Hawes:

That's absolutely it, yes. I wasn't even in service just of my own project or my own episode at that point. I think you're completely right, Bill, and some of the most satisfying creative experiences I've had as the director were working on extremely low budget films for the BBC, when that creative triangle of the director, the producer, the writer knew together what the vision was. It goes back to the Friction that I talked about earlier. You're all in the service of one end, one object and you can work together, having the debates, having the necessary tension.

As the executives got promoted, and they don't so much like the producers having a creative role – my theory is that creative producers have been marginalized. They tend to be replaced by line producers and it all goes back – certainly the UK, I can't speak for other experiences – to a centralization of creative control where certain individuals in networks wanted their direct line to the writers with as little interference in between as possible.

Bill Anderson:

I think the UK quote I remember was that the director was the curse between the commission and the BAFTA, between the script and the award.

James Hawes:

Well, that cheered me up. [Laughter]

Bill Anderson:

Christina Rosendahl also had a question directed towards Isabel – could you tell us why you feel like you're losing hope, that the future for directors looks bleak and why your pessimism is triumphing at the moment.

Isabel Coixet:

Well I think my bleak vision now is a product of the coronavirus pandemic and the unknown. I don't see an end to this – people are talking about in a year, when a week ago people were talking about what's going to happen in six months. Today they're talking about things will be going back to normal – whatever normal is – in a year. I'm writing now the second part of the the series I did for HBO, and and I'm asking myself – I have to add this situation, how this reality outside is affecting my fiction. I have to incorporate details but I don't know, I'm struggling with it, I'm not particularly inspired by masks and people having fever and hospitals and what that pandemic reveals about the structure of our society.

But at the same time I still relish what it is to be on set and shooting and use a camera and telling stories with images, but I guess when you have a film which you spent actually 10 years to make, because I wrote the first draft like 10 years ago, and finally I managed production and to get the lead, Timothy Spall, and it's a film we finished 10 days before the pandemic – and now I wonder how this film is going to play? I asking myself lots of questions – not just it is right to show the film in the movie theater now, I'm asking myself is this film relevant? How the point of view of the audience will change seeing this now.

That's the kind of questions I'm asking myself but I still think being a director is the best thing in the world, really.

Bill Anderson:

James, there's also been a question as to – even though 17 and a half hour a day seven day week is not pure bliss all the time, and probably is a bit life shortening – but how can more directors become producing directors?

James Hawes:

Well it's a broader question that I was going to raise anyway – you've heard me speak in the past about directors as entrepreneurs. I think in a way, you've been an entrepreneur – each film is a business and you launch that business and you manage it and you bring together the team and then you go to sell that business.

I think our careers demand that we are partly an entrepreneur. It's not enough to be an esoteric creative these days I fear, that's gone – you have to market yourself, you have to compete and you have to be a manager in the same way that we learn to manage a set, we have to manage ourselves and market ourselves in some way.

So I think part of the answer is showing yourself as a capable production person who knows how to champion that individual episode, all those projects, and that's where you start to get looked at as a producing director. It's considered a very senior role, and I guess that's the answer – get established with a couple of standout episodes, have a reputation as being an efficient manager of production and then you will get considered.

Isabel is smiling at me and it's slightly unnerving now, I'm not sure what I said...

Isabel Coixet:

Yes, you have to be all these things you said, but also look it – it's very important. You have to not just be it, you need to be very efficient, yes, and if you're a woman like 10 times more efficient – but that's the theme for another panel. Teona, I guess you agree with me...

Teona Strugar Mitevska:

Totally – looking it is very important. I often say – when I made my two first films I had to look like a truck driver in order to be taken seriously. But yes, another panel...

Birgitte Stærmose:

One thing that I would be really curious to hear all of you speak about is – how do you experience your influence on your ability to have your personal artistic imprint on the films and TV series that you direct? Do you feel like you're there 50%, 70% 100%? Do you feel compromised in terms of making that imprint?

Isabel Coixet:

Well, I waited until working for HBO in this case, that was really something personal for me. It was me and I ended up doing the series I did like a theme park of all my obsessions, more personally you die – but you have to fight for that. I tried to do this thing forever and until I was sure it was going to be the way I wanted and I dreamt it, I didn't do it. I had experiences presenting this project where everybody was looking at me like I was crazy – so you're gonna do a TV series talking about Marguerite Duras or Hiroshima mon amour or Buñuel films.

But it's a stubbornness, I guess. We talked about trust before – you have to trust yourself, well not yourself – I don't trust myself, I trust what I want to do more than I trust myself.

Birgitte Stærmose:

I want to go out for dinner with you, that's all I have to say [Laughter]. Renaud, how do you experience your ability to get your personal imprint, especially when you're working within the realm of the biggest streamers or with a big executive power behind the project?

Renaud Bertrand:

It's not very difficult for me but it doesn't happen through fights or arguments. It's closer to what I was trying to say about desire – when my desire is here to do something, to put a project on certain tracks, in fact that desire is contagious. It's more through attraction than the promotion that I'm managing to bring my touch to the project.

But I definitely think that if the project I directed had been directed by somebody else, it would have been completely different. Recently what I've been working on could be comedy but it's not, it is dramatic – but it's about human feelings.

For me, first of all I have to believe in the scenes I'm directing. And so my credo is to put some truth in what I'm doing, in my vision based on the observation of the world. It comes through very subtle work that I'm doing with the actors, with all the crew, the light etc.

But I'm not sure it gets noticed all the time – especially by the people you talk about, from platforms. I don't think it's very important, because I don't want to be noticed – the thing that matters is that the audience feels it. Many times I've had people telling me 'there's something I feel, something very strange, like it's real, when I saw your movie I was kind of distraught because of it'.

So yes, I definitely think there is something there's an imprint you can put on the project without being too conflictual.

Birgitte Stærmose:

So you have a secret feeling that you're definitely in there, but you're not sure that it's recognized. I recognize that feeling.

Bill Anderson:

I absolutely agree with the Renaud, and I think that whenever I'm told to stop fussing about something because the audience will never get it, I always reply 'they may not get it, but it will get them' – and it is not something the algorithm recognizes, but human beings as an audience recognize it, and that's what they come to see. Not what the calculation of the last 17 shows averaged will bring them, but actually some form of human connection, to get back to the kind of thing that Liv was speaking about the beginning of the session.

Birgitte Stærmose:

Teona, you were taking notes – do you want to add something?

Teona Strugar Mitevska:

I like what Bill said, that so I was actually writing that down because it is so important. We all have to do compromises – well not me – no I'm joking [Laughter] – but ultimately it is about creating certain sensations and a certain experience for the audience, for the viewer. Details are actually the key to it all. And sometimes these many people – producers, etc – do not understand the importance of it, and why we insist on this so much but it is essential.

Before that actually, what I was writing was – I was actually inspired by Isabel and came up with an idea for a series. I never thought about a series before so I just wrote it down, but I think I have six episodes.

Birgitte Stærmose:

She wants to be executive on it I think [laughter]. James, do you want to add something to this question?

James Hawes:

How can I beat the fact that Teona just came up with six episodes right there? I mean hey the panelists saw it here live!

Obviously what I was thinking is that my experience is a little different in that I go and I make individual projects, which I do think I have authorship on and there I get to do the attention to detail. And then I go in and I'm a bitch for hire, I do my episodes on some established series, and I have to accept that the landscape will be different and that I have to go in and do my best for that episode. And as Isabel has acutely pointed out, negotiate some of the details I can change and accept those I can't, which sounds like something I was taught in Sunday school but yeah.

So it's a again schizophrenia, it's the two different roles and inhabiting different spaces.

Bill Anderson:

I agree with you – James and I have both done this british iconic show called Doctor Who, and it has got a sort of Tardis sonic screwdriver religious iconography that cannot be touched, because that would be to challenge god, but what is really interesting about the show is that because the story travels to different places every episode, every time, when you come in and do an episode, the world of your episode is unknown to the show.

I mean the iconography of the Doctor etc is there, so you have this kind of schizophrenia ripped very clearly because there are executives who are experts in 30 years of iconography of this show, but still know nothing about the world that they find themselves in right now, and you know every bit as much and hopefully more than them.

When you go in, what are some of the strategies that you employ to actually preserve your creative space, and push back against the pressure of the algorithm or the pressure of the money? Real life strategies?

Birgitte Stærmose:

Your best survival skill, basically [Laughter].

Isabel Coixet:

Kalashnikov, axes...

Renaud Bertrand:

Love...

James Hawes:

Isn't it those two things side by side? You go in and you have to try and make people feel included and involved, having them in the tent with you rather than outside – and then you have to be tough, you have to draw your lines and then the axe, the kalashnikov and any other weapon you have is also useful.

Teona Strugar Mitevska:

I have a method – I prepare excessively, so if somebody else wants to change something, it's too complicated [Laughter].

Renaud Bertrand:

They would find a way, don't worry, you can trust them on that.

Birgitte Stærmose:

One last question, as a closing – if you all could have a wish for the future European director, what would it be? Well, you could have two wishes, actually, I'll be generous.

Isabel Coixet:

Being european is a blessing and is a curse. If I have to make a wish, it would be first of all to expand, really expand this idea of Europe. Include as many European people we can, while preserving the most idealistic idea of Europe. And keep doing our jobs as best as we can.

James Hawes:

First of all, this may be the last forum I'm on as a European before we [the UK] finally leave so, as a nearly ex-european one – I'm being a little facetious... Well this is going to sound a little bit primary school – that directors can be better at helping each other and less competitive.

I once tried to set up a production company based around five significant directors, every one of them came to the meetings and the idea was that we would become the originators of product, and we'd be a production company and we would get funding – in fact I had funding. And one of the executives who came to me and said – James, getting directors together is like herding cats. You'll all fall in love with a project somewhere, you'll be there in the company and suddenly you'll lose two of your numbers because they want to make the movie in Tahiti, or they want to do the series in Iceland, and you'll never be there. And of course he was right to a huge extent, and I couldn't get us to stick. One of the reasons we're vulnerable in the way we're talking about it is because we're not good enough at sharing and coming to a consensus outside of these rather gorgeous panels. So that's one.

And the other is that we invent some new relationship between the big screen and the small screen. At the moment it is being dictated by Netflix, we are responding, we are playing catch up. Speaking as a small screen director with big screen ambitions – I think there is a symbiotic relationship to evolve here, people want the event, they want to go out to the big screen and post COVID, the parties are going to be amazing and we're all going to want to go and rediscover that experience. I don't have the answer but it should be something that the new collective of directors is brainstorming.

Birgitte Stærmose:

Thank you. Renaud?

Renaud Bertrand:

I agree with you, isolation is one of the most difficult aspect to tackle. I've been very lonely during my career and every time I got involved in a union or in FERA, I've always took something very positive from it – it really helped me to be stronger, more trustful, more open-minded and maybe to be more myself so yes, being united is key.

That's something I've never understood – the fact that directors can be so competitive. If we accept our differences, and we all have something very special to bring to this profession, we don't have to be competitive.

To be able to altogether grow our specificity and still be ourselves in happiness rather than becoming angry – well, we have to be angry, but frustration and anger doesn't have to be our primary motivation.

Staying together, and trying to still find some kind of space of creativity despite what the world is becoming with the rise of new platforms and with the new deal of this profession. Voilà.

Birgitte Stærmose:

Thank you. Teona, you get the last point.

Teona Strugar Mitevska:

Listening to you all, I was thinking that there was a time of when directors were gods – so James, maybe your problem was that you tried to gather five gods – and well, the idea of a director as a god is the past. Directing is a job, it's a creative job. There's still some gods left but what we are talking about about – cooperation, creative cooperation, exchanges of ideas etc, is more and more present because it is now predominantly a job, therefore exchanging our experiences is essential.

This being said, my biggest wish is to continue making films if I can, and I hope I will. And to add to what Isabel said, because that touches me profoundly – Europe is not a territory, it's an ideal, and the beauty of Europe in European cinema is its diversity. What is more beautiful than that? Look at us today.

Birgitte Stærmose:

Thank you so much, Teona, and thanks to all of you. Klemen, do you want to close off?

Klemen Dvornik:

Thank you Birgitte, thank you Bill, you did a great job with this insightful in-depth, thoughtful conversation. I hope that our attendees really enjoyed it as I did – thank you for this, all of you.

As a conclusion, I would like to invite everybody to our next session which is next week on Tuesday at 5 PM. We titled it “Doomsday or rebirth? A rebellious take on European film's future” and I hope that we will have another fabulous panel as today.

Thank you everybody for joining, thank you to our panelists for the in-depth, insightful and really personal thoughts that you shared with us and thank you Birgitte and Bill for moderating.

This was the first session of FERA online General Assembly anniversary series. Thank you.

About Us

Founded in 1980, FERA represents the independent voice of European film and TV directors in Brussels. With 48 organizations as members from 33 countries, it speaks for more than 20,000 European film and TV directors, representing their cultural, creative and economic interests at national and EU level.

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