

CENTRE INTERNATIONAL DE LIAISON DES ECOLES DE CINÉMA ET DE TÉLÉVISION

THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FILM AND TELEVISION SCHOOLS

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SCHOOL'S BEST KEPT SECRETS



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Editor's Preface

Best Kept Secrets, Bratislava and Amsterdam

GEECT, the European Regional Organization of CILECT, held conferences in Bratislava and Amsterdam, inspired by the challenge of Renen Schorr, Director of the Sam Spiegel Film and Television School in Jerusalem, to reveal the “best kept secrets.” His assumption was that each school has some very special ways of teaching, and that it would be mutually useful if these ways were revealed.

CILECT's Executive Council took the decision that the Best Kept Secrets meetings, which were partially supported by CILECT funds, were of sufficient interest to make the papers available to the entire membership of CILECT.

The meetings were recorded and transcribed, and I had the responsibility of converting them from a series of verbal presentations to written texts, in more or less colloquial English. In most cases, relatively little needed to be done in order to clarify the substance of the presentations. In some cases, fairly drastic editing was required, and the revised texts were sent to the authors with a request that they confirm that their meanings were preserved, or revise and amend the documents to ensure that this was the case.

I wish to warmly acknowledge the help of the conference organizers, Zuzana Gindl-Tatárova of VŠMU in Bratislava, and Marieke Schoenmakers, of NFTA in Amsterdam, organizers of the respective conferences, and Henry Verhasselt, CILECT's indispensable Executive Secretary, who took on the Herculean effort of designing and publishing this volume. In this way, all of the CILECT membership have the opportunity to learn some of the “Best Kept Secrets” of our GEECT colleagues.

Henry Breitrose
Vice President for Research and Publication

BRATISLAVA

VŠMU

BEST KEPT SECRETS

30.9—03.10.04



Detail of Ganymede's Fountain, Bratislava

the secret of how it all began

In 2000 I attended the GEECT conference that dealt with recruiting new students.

Among other speakers was our colleague, Caterina d'Amico, from the Centro Sperimentale in Rome. She noted her school's observation that while the average Italian candidate was well-versed in American films, he or she had only the faintest knowledge of Roberto Rossellini and Federico Fellini.

They decided to tackle this matter by holding a screening of 100 masterworks of the Italian cinema, followed by an exam. As a result, the students who passed the test and enrolled in the school received a sturdy framework for their education, while the unsuccessful candidates at least enjoyed an entertaining lesson that broadened their general knowledge of the cinema.

On the flight home to Israel, I wrote out my own variation of this idea, and now our students sit through four intensive days of the best of Israeli cinema, prior to the beginning of the school year.

I realized that we should make a point of sharing. Why don't we all get together at a conference, and each reveal five or six of these simple and applicable pearls of wisdom, and thus improve our schools?

And this is how the Bratislava conference was born.

Our partner, Dr. Zuzana Gindl-Tatárová, kindly agreed to host the conference in her school, FTF VŠMU, and handle the logistics. Zuzana and I made up an initial list of various procedure that are common among film schools, from orientation procedures on the day before school begins to our relationship with graduates.

*Renen Schorr,
JSFS, Israel*

The goal of the conference followed the plan of the GEECT Executive Council to organize some special conferences and workshops for film schools teachers and administrators in Europe.

The Bologna Agreement and other sources of student mobility in the expanded European Union lead us not only to harmonize our academic systems or revise the number of years needed to get a Master's Degree; they press us to share our professional and pedagogical experiences as well. Teachers at our schools need to be able to teach and prepare their students for the era of globalisation and rapid development of communication, to prepare them for the age of increasing co-production.

The European Union's MEDIA Programme support leads us not only to "train trainers", but to think about how to help young professionals to enter the professional audiovisual environment.

The name of the conference was a similar challenge: to invite our colleagues to be generous in offering some introspection into their pedagogical methods and tricks and share them with other European film professors. In a sense, we invite them to display their family silver.

*Zuzana Gindl-Tatárová,
VŠMU, Slovakia*

“Our Schools’ Best Kept Secrets” was planned to examine particularly effective aspects of some school programmes. It is a reality that some schools have well-recognized reputations for the quality of teaching, effectiveness of organisation and nurturing the talent of their students. Inevitably, the work of students from these schools dazzles, and their graduates have a great impact on world cinema.

No school has a secret formula guaranteeing success, but the schools have different strengths in different areas. These strengths have emerged not by accident, but by design. They are the result of a deliberate policy. We are interested in "why?" and "how"?

Our project seeks to look at the combinations of input and output, of teachers and students, of course-structures or philosophy that has built the schools that stand tall in the world of audio-visual education.

Most schools share the same problems. Their solutions vary.

In order to facilitate fruitful dialogue, we have listed some elements we feel might lead us forward. We have called these elements — SECRETS

We have listed them in a chronological sequence following the typical school year, rather than in order of priority.

1. STUDENT SELECTION – THE CREATIVE PRODUCER

There have already been several significant exchanges among schools on varying methods for selecting students. However, we propose to look specifically at the selection of “creative producer” students.

Since there appears to be no obvious formal pre-school training, where do these entrepreneurs come from? How can their potential be assessed during the selection process? Are we looking for visual literacy, or an intuitive instinct for recognising a story with cinematic potential? Or should we look for business skills based on past experience?

2. WEEK ONE

Some schools have given much thought and experimentation to the students' first week in school. They recognise that this period sets the "tone" of the school for the next three or four years. In the first week of film school, a new social group is born. Many students from different specialisations will form links that may last a lifetime.

Should the first week be given to forming group loyalties, or should it concentrate instead on allowing the individuals to present themselves and their work?

3. THE FIRST EXERCISE

Students enter film school from the very first day obsessed with the idea of being filmmakers. They cannot wait for their first practical experience. But most schools delay the first film exercise for weeks, even months. It is the carrot that drives the donkey through the initial process of learning the basic.

Timing is crucial. So is the nature of the exercise itself.

4. VISUAL LANGUAGE

On average, students entering film school at age 22 have seen at least 10,000 hours of television. They have only seen around 1,000 hours of cinema images on a big screen, and if they have a visual language, it is inevitably that of television. They frequently have little interest in the long evolution of cinematic language.

On location, students revert to the most powerful visual influence they have experienced -- that of television.

Some schools have methods of reversing this trend. They appear to celebrate *cinema*. How do they achieve this desirable result?

5. AUTEUR VS PRODUCER

School after school is embracing the Triangle Principle -- the creative partnership of the student screenwriter, producer and director. Fewer schools reject the division of labour and hold to the principle of the "total" filmmaker and other residues of the *politique d'auteur*.

We are interested in a dialogue examining the arguments for and against either approach, and we welcome those who have found a middle way. Some schools place storytelling at the centre of their educational philosophy. Others are more oriented to craft or technical training. Either way, it would be interesting to learn how they integrate the training of producers.

6. BUILDING THE MUSCLES OF THE IMAGINATION

Jean-Claude Carrière once observed that the imagination is like a muscle and argued that a powerful imagination is the result of constant exercise. What are those exercises?

Can a personal vision and voice actually be *taught*, or merely encouraged? How is this achieved?

Are there other subjects that should be

taught — like photography, painting, perspective and form in art and so on? How do we build the student's visual vocabulary to enable his or her imagination to be realised?

7. AUDIENCE AWARENESS

How can we help students to be cognisant of their potential audience? Is this a part of the script development process, or is it a continuous process throughout production, and, in particular, post-production?

Does a student really care about the audience? On the other hand, what can a school do to educate its potential audience in appreciation of the short film form?

8. BREAKING THE MOULD

The film school can be a hermetically sealed, safe world in which standards of excellence are self-defined, but in those circumstances, how do schools prepare their students for exposure to the tough world of professional filmmaking?

What is the relationship between the school and the local industry? Some schools have tried internships, professional mentoring, and industrial sponsorship of student productions. How effective are such relationships as a learning process?

How can we help students understand professional work, not just in terms of high-level skills, but also in presentation of self, the importance of social skills etc?

9. GRADUATION EVENING

A school does not exist to produce films. It exists to produce skilled filmmakers for the future. Their work, shown as evidence of their graduation is important, not just as a showcase for future employers, but also of the school that nurtured them.

But graduation screenings usually tend to highlight the students of directing. How do schools publicly recognise the essential contribution producers, designers, cinematographers, editors, et al?

Many schools have a tradition of formal ceremonies. Others favour a more relaxed celebration. However it is marked, graduation is a milestone for the graduates and a goal for all the students who follow.

10. THE MORNING AFTER.

Does a school have a responsibility for students after they graduate? What are the different strategies for easing the passage of graduates from school to employment?

Some schools work hard to establish systems of placements; others have various forms of "greenhouse" support to help students prepare packages for potential first films. Other schools merely say "Congratulations, goodbye, and keep in touch."

What attention is paid to the preparation of packages of scripts, show reels etc. for graduates to offer prospective employers?

Students who graduate have usually worked creative teams within the school and frequently seek to maintain this relationship after graduation. What guidance is given to students to help them form limited companies or partnerships?

11. TRACKING ALUMNI

How do schools maintain contact with graduates in later life? Often successful graduates show their appreciation by returning to present master-classes and workshops.

Others are willing to be mentors of successive generations of students.

Some may even become benefactors, as is not uncommon in North America.

Do schools include recent graduates on committees or review bodies considering curriculum or other changes in the structures of the school? Many schools consider such informed feedback vital.

How many schools maintain comprehensive records for tracking the graduates, so as to providing a profile of the school's relevance to the national industry?

Renen Schorr, JSFS, Jerusalem



THE FIRST WEEK

I begin with three questions to ask about filmmaking:

b The first question is **why we are telling film stories?** Does it mean that we are not talking about dramatic structures, but rather about film's cultural function, which is really a different matter?

The second question is **how can pictures tell stories,** and how can we tell stories through pictures.

There is a wonderful philosophical term in German, *Weltanschauung*. It means a worldview, or a **way of looking at the world**, and it is the basis of my third question.

I will try to explain my questions. In our school, we, as filmmakers, do not talk about these topics but we invite interesting people from outside the school, from outside film, from outside media, to talk with us about these issues. We've invited philosophers, scholars of various theologies, media philosophers, novelists, all kinds of interesting people, to talk with us about these issues.

One of the scholars who writes about why we tell stories is Neal Postman, whose idea is that every culture is based on a big story, or as he calls it, a "master narrative," and if you can understand as a filmmaker that it is a basic cultural function to tell stories, then it demands a very different approach from the writer, director, producer.

The second question, how pictures can tell stories,

how we can tell stories with pictures is most important for me.

I was invited in Munich to open an exhibition of sketches by Federico Fellini for his films, and I was forced to do some research. There are wonderful interviews of Federico Fellini. He said that he never started a film with a script. He always started with drawings. This makes some sense, if one remembers that he began as an artist, but it is a very different approach to filmmaking, which causes me to disagree with Renen Schorr.

I think we have to strengthen the position of the director, the position of the film auteur. Next year at HFF-Munich, we will start a new class, which we call in German *Autorenfilm*, the Film d'Auteur. It is a special class for writer/directors because last year there was a really misleading development about the position of the director.

There was a Media Programme conference, and there were a lot of wonderful workshops about story telling, and about how we have to make a perfect story. We were told

that we must have story editors, and story consultants, but I don't think it is the right path for the European film.

I think the importance of the *auteur*, the writer/director, is that everyone has in his mind a kind of cosmos of his own perception. It may be that lessons in dramaturgy may help improve your story dramatically, but not semantically. We have to deal with the question of how we can combine narrative with visualisation, narrative with imagination. We haven't talked much about this for the last ten years. We always talked about narrative.



Andreas Gruber, HFF Munich

As for my third question, and it is perhaps the most personal of these questions.

Film is *Weltanschauung*, the way in which the world is seen. The filmmaker's work is to look at the world. We've dealt with the problem in recent years because our students tried to make a clear distinction between themselves and the story they are telling. They try to distance themselves from the story. This does not mean that I am especially fond of autobiographical stories, but I think you have to know your own position in the world and be aware how you characterize people. Is it your view that they have no choices, or do they have choices? You have to talk about people who are able to change, and those who are unable to change, and have a kind of hope despite everything...or not?

We create a stance toward the world on the basis of our own experience, our own memories. It is not perception alone, but rather it is perception and memory. It implies a kind of consciousness of the world, and whatever else a filmmaker and auteur/director does, he creates a new world and shows it to others. And this new world means derives from his position to this world.

We thought that we had to talk about these three issues with our students before even talking about lenses or about dramatic structures. Technique is a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, because if you learn all about techniques, and you get familiar with them, you put all your hopes into techniques, and you say my story will function when the dramatic structure functions. My story will function if I have a good producer. My story will function if all frames are really sharp. In our view, the story will never function if you do not deal with the kinds of questions that I've proposed.

How long does it take?

One week, five days.

What is the internal structure of these first five days.

The internal structure is that we try to combine familiarizing the students with the procedures of the school, its buildings, the library, and studios, with higher level theoretical lessons.

We have an assignment that we call *Black Box 1.30*. It is a kind of introduction film, or an interview film with all the beginning students, and they get 1 minute 30 seconds each. They go in front of the camera and talk

about their own life, their own personality. It is shot in sections and our assistants edit it on the last day.

So each student is speaking about himself for a minute and half. How many students are involved?

We make it for the three departments: fiction, documentary and production. It is our first step to bring the departments together, and not to split them up.

At the end of the five days we have the screening of the new students' self-portraits. It is very interesting. We also screen films by our former students to show what happened in the school in recent years. You know you can't put fifty students in a room and talk from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm. You have to make a programme that not only involves listening but allows for also some activity.

I think this is a wonderful agenda for the first week. But how do you think it will affect the way the curriculum will work for the rest of their time at school?

It is clear that if questions are being raised which are fundamental, it must influence the way in which they learn, the way they talk, otherwise the week is gone and they can go straight back to the narrow details and lose sight of these important issues.

I think there is a kind of trend for not only the students but also for the teachers in our school to return to the basic questions of filmmaking, and maybe this is a kind of preface for all of our curricula.

But it's not only questions. The teacher has to show some kind of position, some kind of *Weltanschauung*. The students can oppose this position, or they can agree, or they can discuss it, but I don't really believe that a teacher can sit in front of the students and say "well, maybe". It is not really a cinematic position. In filmmaking, you have to learn to be concrete, so I think that the teachers have to give their own positions, and open their mind a little bit to show the students their position. You can be against me, you can argue, but you have a kind of counterpart.

How, for instance, do you think the Fellini example of always starting with drawings should influence the way the scripts are developed?

I think it should influence the scripts, as they are being developed. We have not admitted a class of writer/director students this year but hopefully next year, and then I will try to create a programme in which scripts are developed in a really different way from the normal method.

Renan Schorr, JSFS, Jerusalem

Now what will be the result? Is it your own idea of how the Munich school should change? In the past, Munich tended to less technically oriented than some schools, but now it has huge productions with a lot of special effects. It is very impressive.

You know, we are discussing our position because Germany has six film schools and we have to find our own niche.

The Munich school has a tradition of writer/directors. It was famous for it, and in my mind if you are very conservative for a long enough time, you are *avant-garde* the next day. We were quite conservative for a long time and we did not change the curriculum very much. This kind of writer/director education started thirty years ago and maybe we are again *avant-garde* because everybody starts to specialise – writers, directors, producers – that is the way the Triangle works and how we have to set our curriculum. We tried the writer/director idea not for everyone, but for one class.

When you say one class, does it mean that the other class will be directors that will work with the producers or with the writers, and that there will be two classes for directors?

Yes. We will have two kinds of directing curricula. One is for writer/directors and one is a normal directing class.

You know our structure may be quite different from other film schools because we have a lot of free-lance teachers and very few full-time teachers. The top of the free-lance teachers are really brilliant teachers, like Andrzej Mellin. I want him for both the writer/director and for the traditional directing curriculum, or Miroslav Mandic, who I also want to keep. They both understand what I'm talking about.

But when Renen talked about the character of the producing students and how they will change his school, we have a related development in our film school and I don't agree with it at all. Our producers have a very good curriculum, and they are really tough. They are starting their own companies in the second year, and my students of directing have to go to them and discuss their scripts and they behave like the worst editors at the TV companies. They say "no, get out, I am not interested. Who would watch this! No, no!"

I think it is better to change the producers than to change the directors.

I will strengthen the directors. That is my position.

Maybe it is the current situation in Munich and this is a change in order to rebalance the set up at school.

No, it is not the main reason to do this, but I am really convinced that the European cinema I really admired was the cinema of films *d'auteur* and we are losing this in Europe, so it is not a decision against anybody but rather a decision in favour of the writing/directing that I really admired in European cinema for so many years.

So you are now accepting students for two directing curricula?

We start with the same basic first year curriculum, they can specialise in the second, third and fourth year.

And if they think that they are "auteurs", and you think that they are not, what will you do?

They believe that they are full artists, that they are Chaplins, and that they can also write the music.

I don't deal with this problem that much. I deal with the individual students. They say "I am a director, why should I write?" There are very few really talented who can write and direct, and we've organized a special programme for them.

Which programme you think would be more elitist, more wanted by the students?

I don't know. It is really the decision of the students. It's an offer. There is a very unique aspect of the Munich Film School. The focus is on how to combine narrative with visualisation, and finding visual approaches to narration is two years of director/writer education.

Who are the teachers for this curriculum?

They are very different. There is a media philosopher, a wonderful man from Vienna. He wrote a splendid book about culture and generations. He is a cultural philosopher. There is a theology scholar, a journalist, a novelist, all very well known and interesting figures in Germany.

Nathalie Degimbe

I am very glad to learn about your problems. We have quite similar problems. Every year all the teachers at the school meet to discuss the issues they want for a whole day.

A week earlier we ask each teacher what they want to talk about, this year the almost universal problem was that all the students are interested in is workshops and practical work and absolutely not in intellectual and theoretical lectures. The conclusion is that we see we have more good technicians and fewer creative people. The students are completely concentrated on the question of how film works and not why.

Your prologue week is a way of putting these questions of why first on the agenda and it is a very important way to establish a creative attitude.



THE FIRST WEEK

There is a problem most of you know very well. Often, the “warming up” period for a new class could last a semester or more before you can really say that we are together and we know what why.

There is a new class for documentary film directors, cinematographers and production managers starting now, and I heard about **an education camp they did for the first week**. I was interested, because I thought it could be interesting for you.

The faculty decided to give a common education for the three disciplines for the first three semesters, and they decided to spend an intensive week together, far from the capital, to enable them to get to know each other. In fact, the professor in charge, who is a very good documentary filmmaker, asked lots of municipalities if they would host this kind of workshop. The only positive answer came from the poorest region, close to the eastern border. So three professors and twelve students went there, to a small house, for a week.

At the first meeting on the very first day, the professors told each student why he or she had accepted to teach at the school. Then the students were told what would happen during these seven days, and they were organized into four groups of three crew members each: a director, a cinematographer and a production manager. They gave them some general facts about the area, and then asked them to present film subjects the next day. Each group was asked to present three subjects for a short documentary.

The next day they discussed the subjects as a group and they chose two of the groups who succeeded in presenting an acceptable project. The other two groups had to go back, come with better ideas, and start a day later.

Once the projects were accepted, the crews had to go out and do the pre-production and organisation, and deal with everything necessary to deal with the subject. When it was properly pre-produced, they got the green light to go out and shoot.

This resulted in one week of four crews shooting, and every evening they were to

present one section of their rushes that they considered to be important.

This meant a very intensive first week, and of course there were lots of crises. People had difficulties working in a crew and there were conflicts among crew members, among teams and between professors and students. The films were shot, and all of the participants praised this week, even though there were lots of problems. It does not end here because they will continue working on these subjects, using



their rushes for their first exams, and they will also shoot additional material for their films in Budapest. The material for the first semester documentary exam film will be put together on location at the school in Budapest.

How many teachers are involved in this camp? How many teachers at school, the people who are dealing with the first year?

This was the idea and the first experiment of Professor Tamásy and he went to the camp with the students, the cinematography teacher who works with him, and the production management teacher, so there were three professors involved with the 12 students of one class.

THE FIRST WEEK

I will briefly introduce Week 1 in our school, and I will come to something very practical. Our approach is totally different from Andreas Gruber's view.

We accept students for all three curricular streams, and we have **one meeting with them all a month before the start of the school year**. In this meeting, we do something that I find very effective.

We prepare photos of each student with his name, age, his birthplace, where he spent his formative years, where he spent his army assignment if was in the army, what he did after the army, his studies or jobs, and his e-mail address and telephone number. We distribute copies to the students.

At the meeting, we tell them some very basic things about the school, because they are very excited and in various states of shock. I agree with Janos. It takes time. We speak about some general issues, and then we let each student briefly present himself or herself. It takes two to three hours for everyone to speak about himself.

It gives them the opportunity to know who is going to be in their class and in the other programmes, and it gives each of them an opportunity to phone or mail one another about practical issues, such as where and when they intend move to Jerusalem. Over eighty per cent of the students do not come from Jerusalem, and they come from all over the country, so they have very practical problems of where to live, how to rent an apartment and with whom to share the rent. At their first meeting they get all the relevant details about one another so they can work with this information.

Before the official school year begins, the students have very basic technical studies. We want them in pre-studies to lose their fears and anxieties about technical issues. We know that the vast majority of the students who enter the general first year film curriculum as it is in our school, have no significant technical experience, and they are frightened about operating the camera, and running the computerised editing machine. We give them 4-5 intensive days in small groups, from morning to night, to learn technical basics from students or graduates or teachers. Throughout this week they can meet their friends from the class in small groups to share and lose their anxieties together.

The following week is totally outside the school. They meet in the Jerusalem Cinematheque where they have four intensive days, from 9.00 am to 6.00 pm, of 35mm screenings of Israeli cinema, beginning in the '50s, and discussion with the best teachers. Every second year we



Renen Schorr, JSFS, Jerusalem

look at short film as a genre, and screen 30-40 short films, half Israeli, half from all over the world, from very well known directors like Roman Polanski, and from current film schools from all over the world.

These entering students have four days of intensive viewing and discussion of short films, which is intended to help them understand that the major thing they are going to do at the school is make short films. This will be their world for the next three or four years. It gives them a compass and a map of the world they are entering; the short film, locally and internationally.

Then all the students, full time, part-time, regardless of their curricular stream, begin the first year of their studies, which starts with what we "call the process of study."

We give edited versions of the student biographies and pictures to all the teachers. The teachers, some of whom are very tough, read this materials. Some of the teachers were on

THE FIRST WEEK

Renen Schorr, JSFS, Jerusalem

the entrance examination committee and from the first week they know who the students are, but after the second week in practical and theoretical classes, we demand that the teachers know their students' first names and surnames, so that they may approach the student in a direct and straightforward way. For the teachers, this is a very simple but a very effective way to develop very fast rapport with the students.

The students have 14 or 15 different courses and teachers in the first semester. A student who was chosen to study at school is still in cultural shock, because it is a totally new world, using a totally new language. The student feel better if his teachers know his name and address him by name. I believe that this very small act of giving these details to the students and especially to the teachers is very effective in beginning a new year.

We insist that teachers know students' names, and we distribute biographies in all the other years because in the second and third year there are new teachers who don't know the students.

How many students are involved?

This year we have 24 students in the full curriculum, 10 in the producers' curriculum and 20 in the screenwriting curriculum.

When do they receive the photographs, biographies, and contact numbers?

They receive them a month before, which cushions the shock of meeting 50-55 new faces simultaneously. We gather all the students and all the staff of the school, some 17 people in all. They know me, they may know the head secretary who arranges all the exams, but they don't know the technicians, or the librarian, or those who will deal with them in the international affairs office in two years' time, and the idea is for them to have the names and the pictures of their colleagues and the staff, because they meet the teachers in the first week, anyway, and they will spend an hour, two, or three, with each one, so they'll know them, but whenever they see one of the staff members in the corridor, even if it is someone who hasn't dealt with them directly, they know who he is.

It reduces the cultural shock of entering the place with all expectations of the student

himself and all the anxieties and mythology about the school. It reduces their anxiety and gives them sort of a Who's Who as for student colleagues and staff members.

Anke Zwirner, HFF "Konrad Wolf," Potsdam-Babelsberg

We have a small project called *Der Lauf der Dinge* (The Way Things Go.). Artists Peter Fischli and David Weiss made such a splendid video about movement from found objects. All students come together in the studio and build such a machine or something like it. This is really the first time they are learning how the studio will work on them, and they discover the space of the studio. Each student has to work with the others, and the magic word is co-operation with other students. They have to work with each other because they must think about movement in cause-effect chains, as each movement impacts on the next



THE FIRST WEEK

Selecting the creative producer

We prefer that our student producers come from universities where they studied another discipline, such as Film Studies, Theatre Studies, Media Studies, Journalism, Economics, etc.

In a few cases, we make an exception for a very talented and motivated high school graduate, but in most cases, we recommend that very young talented people get some more experience in life and film or television production, and reapply in a year or two.

We look for students with a drive to tell stories, an urge to initiate and organise projects, a stubbornness to reach goals, an insight in human behaviour, a strong ability to deal with and care for all kinds of people and cleverness to generate and handle money.

From every candidate producer we demand at least one short film (8 minutes maximum length) with a story consisting of a beginning, middle, and end, in that order, self-written, self-directed and self-produced. Why self-written and self-directed by a candidate producer? Because it gives us an insight in the drive of a candidate to tell film stories.

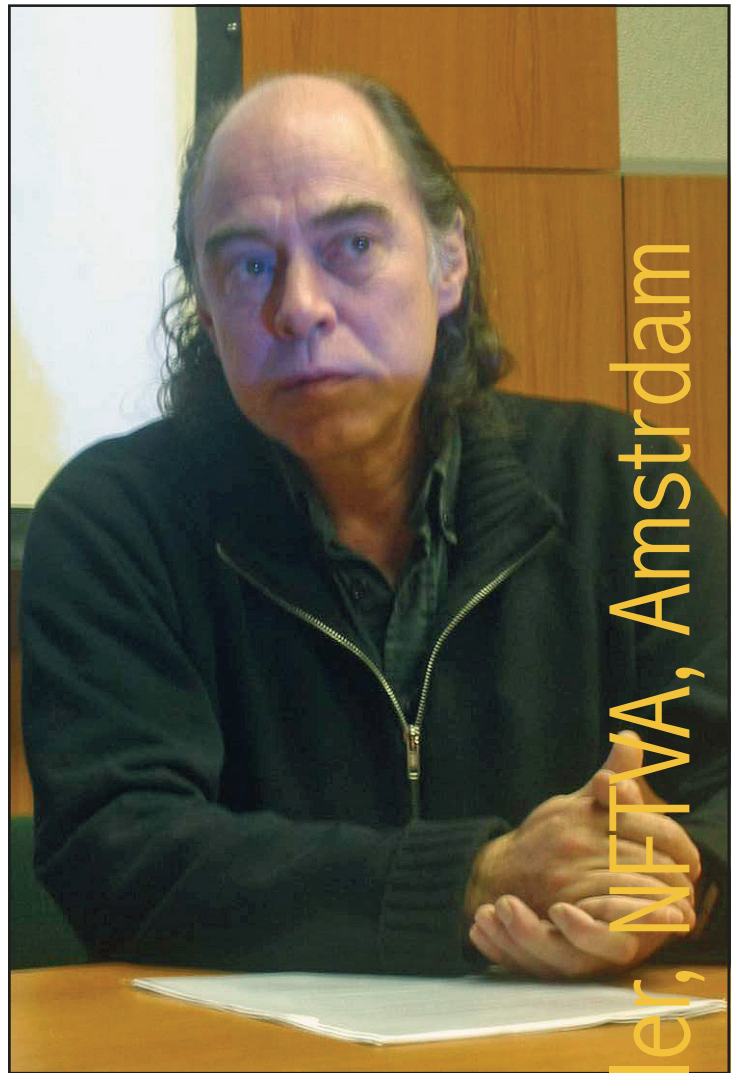
The way candidates fill in their application forms is also an important issue we take into consideration. How do they communicate and present themselves on paper? Did they make work of it to provide us with interesting, relevant and orderly presented information about their motivation, experience and goals?

From the application forms and short films we receive from candidates, we make the first selection. Approximately thirty selected candidates annually are invited to come in for an exam.

The exam consists of three elements: a written part and two oral parts:

For the written exam questions are about differences between story and script (do they recognize the choices the screenwriter made?), about content, plot and characters, about production aspects, the candidates get a short story, a script based on this story and a list of questions. The budget, and target market etc.

Oral exam by a committee of teachers – in which we test their knowledge of recent films, insight in production obstacles and solutions, personal strength and weakness.



Henk Muller, NFTA, Amstrdam

Oral exam by a committee of student producers – in our experience candidates show aspects of themselves in a different way towards students than towards teachers. It is also important that our students have a very good insight if a candidate will fit into the culture / society of our student population.



AUTEUR VERSUS PRODUCER

After 14 years at my school, I've come to the conclusion that the students don't understand

what a producer is.

This is true for the students who are at school, not the young people who want to enter the school. The students do not know what the producer is because in the real life of the school, they produce short films, and because of this, none of them know precisely what it means to be a producer.

Moreover, I sense that at least at our school, we are very much into making short films, quite in the wholly sense. The short film genre has its pros but it also has its cons. The students are less sophisticated in their understanding of what a full length feature really is. For them the short film is a marathon in itself, never mind the length of a full length feature. When we realized this, we wanted to solve it immediately.

We recently started a new summer school project, which we called "Major Research in the Israeli Cinema". The project is to make a dossier, a research file of one full length Israeli feature. We have a list of 25 significant films, low budget production, big production, auteur-like film, all variants of films, and we are putting together two groups of students, each consisting of two aspiring directors and two students of script writing. Their mission is to interview the people responsible for one of the films, from the idea to its theatrical domestically and internationally. The students select one film from a list. This year we have eleven groups of students, so there are a variety of options.

Each group chooses a film, and their task is to interview 10 people who worked on the film. They must interview the producer, the screen writer, the director, the cinematographer, one of the leading actors, the editor, the production designer, the composer, and the distributor. They should meet them at least once, and then they should write it up.

A number of the students resisted, but they had to do it, otherwise they wouldn't be allowed to enter the second year. Some of them proposed a compromise and wanted to shoot it and then edit it, but we said no, you are going to write it, fifty pages. So they

started doing it and now they are reaching the end of it, most of them enjoyed it.

What is the result of this exercise? **For the first time they get an image of how feature films are made.** They can see how a film is being formed, starting from a very basic idea. They see the whole cycle of making a film, which can last at least a year and a half and up to 7 or 8 years. They understand the whole cycle. They understand that making films is a long passage, a marathon. They understand the tasks of people like producer, production designer, distributor, and sometimes is a cinema chain. They understand that the truth is a *Rashomon*. Everyone claims that he is the person without whom the film would not have been made, or would not have been a success. Since it is usually only very successful films which find a place in the Israeli film culture, it is not only the director who stakes claim the fame for the film. It is a kind of *Rashomon*, a story that depends on who tells it, so they must speak again to people who understand what really happened and how major decisions throughout the shoot, its preproduction of shoot and post-production were done. This usually results in enough material for 150 pages of interviews, about the length of a feature script, and then they need to allocate proportions and create a hierarchy for all the people they interviewed and to collectively turn the interviews into a story, beginning with the initial idea, ending with the distribution, and forgetting about the screen credits in the narrative of who did what. Since most of the films were done on shoestring budgets, there were crises, and the story of making the film has a built-in dramatic structure.

The students are veterans of the first year first crisis, because to make a very good 3, 5, 10 minute film in the first year, documentary or fiction, they sometimes have arguments among themselves. They know what a crisis looks like, and now they can see how the crisis of what in their mind appears a huge production, was overcome by the majority of the crew, for the benefit of the film.

Personally I believe that regardless of credited director, screen writer, and producer, and the egos that come with it, the real responsibility and creativity happens when people think about the benefit of the film. The students know whose idea it is, who is more artistic or more creative, but the moment of maturity for the students is when they understand that the benefit of the film is what's most important. They understand that sometimes that means a compromise. By researching this issue and writing it, they come to understand that there is something beyond the script, beyond directing, beyond money, and that is the work of many people.

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The students have a chance as to meet people who they wanted to meet, some of them they may admire, because they were sent by the school and the people in the industry like the project. The noted directors love it, but the supporting actors, and the producer, cinematographer and screen writer are astonished and flattered, because usually the only interviews involve director and stars.

In the end, the students understand what working on a long feature is really about, and that every production is a marathon and it is a story in itself, not the usual “making of” public relations nonsense, which is not the real story of what happened, but a real narrative. I saw the film about the making of *La Mancha*, a Terry Gilliam’s film. It is a great film that one can screen to students to show the Don Quixotic motif, or what happens when there is a clash between the director’s dream and the reality, and Terry Gilliam himself increasingly becomes a kind of Don Quixote. It is a very challenging movie, like Eleanor Coppola’s *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker’s Apocalypse*.

We think that this project is an interesting way to let the students understand what film making is really about outside the school, and then whenever they see an Israeli film they will respect the local production more than before.

They have two instructors, we split, it is 11 groups of students with two instructors, the instructors are well known journalists. One of them is also a screenwriter who knows the Israeli scene and they are the mentors of this project and they should submit it the last week of the holiday before they start the second year, then it is read and then they should rewrite it, research it again and rewrite it and we said to them that if it is good, we are going to publish it as a book. If it is 11 projects, 5 or 6 are really well written then after one or two more sessions of reediting or re-interviewing, we see it as an option to make it a school project, to publish it. They should tell the story about the making of that film. But in the full sense of “making of” not what we usually see on television.

Zuzana Gindl-Tatárová

This is interesting. It seems to be really hard work. You know, regarding myself, when I was a student and I finished the school I was pretty lucky because they took me to the studio immediately. My first debut as a script writer was a project with a female protagonist quite far from director’s style, so I went through all professions with this director while helping him to keep the inner story. He was a good director, one of the best at that time, Stefan Uher. His film *Sun in the Net* shot in 1962 was the very first film of the Czechoslovak New Wave. I went with him through all the steps you need to reach the final issue, too. Through script writing, casting, shooting on location, everything, I was always with him. And after the premiere I

never judged films as before. And this is such a personal experience for me. When I entered this school as a pedagogue I was thinking about how to give this experience to students because you can never be enough mature and tolerant if you do not go through something similar. And I guess I should never be so tough as you are with them. I am not sure if I should press them to do things like this during the holidays. But I admire this process even it is not their work or film.



Renen Schorr, JSFS, Jerusalem

AUTEUR VERSUS PRODUCER

Lauri Törhönen, UJAH, Helsinki

One day, Renen Schorr called me and said I have to make a presentation. He asked if I would give a headline for our best kept secret. And I said we don't have any. Finland is an open society. Everything is crystal clear, free, including university education, which is free for everybody. To limit our student enrolment, we teach it in Finnish so you have to master the Finnish language to be able to study with us. I insisted that we didn't have any secrets.

Then Renen asked if I could come back the next Monday with a headline and I said this my headline and my point of view. Most things that I know or can say about the process have been touched here today. I want to thank Renen for his idea of the conference and Zuzana for organising it. It is far better than I ever expected ... or feared. It was a coincidence that I became the Dean of a film school, and now after 8 years I must admit that it was a mistake. I inherited the Euro-auteur-European-old-fashioned-film school where the study of cinema – watching films and analysing them- was the core of the film school curriculum. My predecessor is still a film critic, and the one before him was an academic who, while heading the film school, studied to become a film director. So authorship was the name of the game, or more accurately the *nom* of the *jeu*.

My own career has been somewhat strange because I made auteur films, but most of my work was for two producers. One was in television, and he was actually a theatre director by profession, and the other one was Jörn Donner, who produced most of my long feature films. Donner was Ingmar Bergman's producer in *Fanny and Alexander* for which he received an Oscar.

I was two corners of the Triangle myself because there was no film screenwriting education in Finland, so I was involved in or wrote the shooting scripts, and most of the dramaturgy. I handled the whole process of script writing even though the authors of the books got half of the money. So I know the two angles of the Triangle, and I respect the possibility of having a strong, wise and educated producer on the other side of the net.

This is a bigger game than table tennis, but



it is between the producer and the director and I see it as a friendly game over a net with a ball and some rackets between two friends.

Shortly after I came to the film school there was announcement of a meeting in Rome and this was the first meeting of the GEECT-CILECT Triangle project. I went to Rome at the start, and we have been on it since then. I saw that the only way from the cinema studies syndrome to a studio culture in the film school was to get rid of lots of masterpieces. Of course, they are useful, and you must have them in a film school, but to move the film school to action, to make the filmmaking and professional practise the main task of the film school, one cannot rely on excessive reverence for the past. We have been implementing this philosophy since 1997, and now what we have achieved the first lap of this peaceful Finnish revolution, we have to prepare to begin the second lap.

Of course we have all the problems as everybody else in GEECT. In a small country like Finland, what happened in the European cinema in the '60s and '70s destroyed most of the old and quite strong producing tradition. The young Finnish filmmakers who were inspired by the *Nouvelle Vague* probably didn't even know that Godard had a strong producer behind him. The films in France or anywhere else did not just spring from the brain of the director. It did not happen that way in Sweden because there was a giant, Ingmar Bergman, who made everything in film including a strong rich film education. In my opinion, they are about to destroy it by putting up more and more film schools in Sweden. They already have had two, and that's enough for Sweden. We have eight in Finland, more than in either England or Germany.

Bratislava

AUTEUR VERSUS PRODUCER

In the film school, the strongest opponents of change are the students, especially the Directing students. Dick Ross points out that there is a syndrome. The older students tell the younger students that they have the right to do at least this and this. Because I tried to avoid hiring clones of myself as the junior teachers of direction, I have taken on people who are completely different from me. As a school head, I have not really had time to teach anybody, I was fighting the well-known windmills and trying to avoid the icebergs, things that most of you know well. But the teachers who would be in charge of educating directors, resisted change as well.

What the need to change the situation has brought in the film school is strong screenwriting education. We have been developing it now for about seven years and it takes one student generation or cycle, which is about seven years, to get anything happen in the film school. In three years, you don't even know where you are. Until you meet your colleagues in other countries and in other schools, you don't even have anybody with whom to discuss these problems. Our screenwriting professor comes from the drama academy, but his heart and soul is in film, and I have made him aware of his task, which is to educate a generation of screenwriters, who as soon as possible can take over from him so that we can have real screenwriting education and tradition. That is happening.

But we still do not have a professor in film producing, which is our weak point at the moment. We are academic, part of an arts university. We are going to divorce from the university more or less, this year or next year, but we are going to stay academic as an independent film school or faculty or academy or whatever it is going to be called. We are academic, so we have to do everything from the basic introduction to the doctorate. I see the film disciplines as pillars or columns, and I see the film school producing as a horizontal bar, which goes through all these disciplines. It seems to be very difficult for people to understand that *producing* in the film school is different from teaching film *production* in the film school. One is vertical and disciplinary, and the other is horizontal, and film producing in a film school concerns all disciplines and all students. It is the hands-on teaching of these different columns.

It is difficult for the teachers of film producing to identify themselves. They start involving themselves in other people's business because these things are very difficult to separate from each other. This is one of the key factors to be able to sort out this mess between producers, education and the production of the film school. Everybody who becomes a student in an art school, of course, wants to behave in an artistic way as soon as possible. Everybody has good ideas and young people want to contribute to the films they make and they have big but fragile egos. They may be twenty-something, but egos are big and there is no common wisdom.

The other teachers come to me and say we admit direction students to the school who are too young and inexperienced, and they are weak compared with the sound students and the camera students. The editing, sound and camera students already know something of what it is all about and they love their trade profoundly. Frequently they tried it somewhere, and they want to become artists, so they are older, more experienced, they have been in production or have worked for the radio. To put a twenty year old artistic genius in charge of producing a film creates a controversy. What shall we do?

A 19-year old screenwriter does not sound like a good idea. If you can find screenwriters who are a little bit older, you might get better stories. The producer – can he or she can be very young? She'd better be very rich, so that she recognizes all the zeros in the receipts. To my mind, the producer should be a little older than the others because the producer is in charge of the whole thing. So where is the director here? If also the director is a little bit more experienced, a little older than the others, so who is to be the oldest? In an open system as ours, the academic laws that regulate our activities at university prevent us from creating any thresholds like age or previous education prior to the film school, so we have to be wise about what to do when somebody very young is very talented, so good that you know by experience that if you send her back to mature, she will never come back.

The question has been raised about what percentage of film school students go to the profession. We have 45 years of experience and the percentage is 50%. Five hundred students have come to school to become directors, and 250 have ended up in the business, the rest were anywhere from graveyards to department stores' sports departments. Of the 250, about 30 have directed long feature films and of the 30 fewer than 10 made more than one long feature film. So success is at the very steep end.

Let me again pose the question of what to do, how to do run the second lap of this running contest. I have come to the conclusion that a film school does not change the film industry in our respective coun-

Lauri Törhönen, UIAH, Helsinki

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Lauri Törhönen, UAH, Helsinki

tries. It mirrors it, more or less. Many of our film schools are able to engage professionals and active filmmakers to teach on a freelance basis. They come to the film school, and they know what the film industry needs now and probably in the future. But at the moment, at least half of the professors of film directing in Europe don't agree.

Producing is becoming a trendy profession in Europe, and there is a lot of work for creative producers and professional directors. At the moment there is less work for creative directors and professional producers. I can see that at least at our school, directors and producers are teaming up with some screenwriters. They may start their careers working for television where they get a lot experience very quickly, and it will not take many years until one or more reach the become the feature film firmament, and then we will have a role model for the professions. But I don't know how to get there.

In Scandinavia, we have Lars Von Trier and his group. He is a producer from a film school. They are among the first ones who have made it really big as a result of their film school education. It is not just that these people are famous and rich, but thanks to the Danish Film School and the Danish Film Institute, everybody in the country is rich. The film business is recognized as an organised and legal way of earning your living, suddenly evaluated by the state as a good thing for the nation because it makes money and gives fame to Denmark and they want to invest. And I hope that we can do that as well.

Are you saying that the Triangle does not work? After nine years are you saying it does work?

There is a strange resistance like the editing professor or the professor of film photography, who come and say that the directors are weak because of the Triangle and we don't want to have weak directors. Or the lecturer of film direction who said to me that because screenwriting students study to become long feature film screenwriters, their attitude is dramatic instead of visual so they cannot write visual scripts for the students to direct, and short films are visual, not dramatic. It is good we had this conversation over the telephone because he did not see my face. I said, please repeat what you said.

This is the friction. We are in a phase where there is a lot of friction. I serve the ball back when I say "Does it mean that you don't want us to educate screenwriters in the school because they make films from scripts? Are you against screenwriters' education?"

"Of course not," he says, "but get stronger directors, and have them make some auteur films."

And I say: "What shall we do with the scripts that come from the screenwriters? Should we have the classical Eastern European film school model of six years?"

Let me tell you how I played the major part in a Hungarian long feature film. I was in Budapest for several weeks shooting this film and I have never seen anything as crazy in this business as long feature film production during socialist times. It was even crazier than the Scandinavian television was, until the early '90s. We had a 100 per cent socialist system of national television companies. I made a long feature film for television and there was no budget. I said I want the two steam engine trains I wrote in my script, and nobody blinked. They had to convert one of these locomotives into a Russian one because there were a Russian and Finnish locomotives and nobody asked why, how much it costs. Two big trains were brought 500 km from where they were sitting, to where I chose to have my location. It was nice for me. It was a good film.

Zuzana Gindl-Tatárová

Yes, but ideologically, you needed to follow the top. And then you were allowed even to move the trains, and move the sky and anything, but ideology you needed to be in the line.

Lauri Törhönen

But I have a question here. I know philosophy is perfect. And one of our students was producing a film at the Dramatiska Institutet in Stockholm. It was very interesting because it seems that both sides got a lot of good value of the production because our two cultures live side by side and are best friends, as are the countries, Sweden and Finland, but the cultures are different in many respects. From what I heard, it was good and pure, and they needed a producer because somebody had failed and we needed a film and if anything happens in this business, it happens when the students between themselves want to do something. You cannot force them to do anything, because they have a living project.

I would almost propose that we start exchanging screenplays between film schools and sending them to each other. What about our screenplay? At least to exchange screenplays and by that way get other points of view for the directors to take up, I don't know.

AUTEUR VERSUS PRODUCER

Our way of dealing with issues like Auteur versus Producer-driven production is not conclusive, and while this may not be much of a secret, it may be a useful thought. I also am afraid I am going to go back into the cinema with those old film schools, which Lauri has worked so hard to put behind him.

Students watch many films... not always the films that we want them to see... but they do watch many films. My students love films, but I don't know what they learn from them. The work that they do does not show that they learn a great deal from them, good or bad. Sometimes they aspire to imitate the films that they admire, but the outcome is so far away from their aspirations that they approach parody far too often. Sometimes the parody is deliberate as a kind of post-modern irony, a way for them to distance themselves from the embarrassment of the consequences of being taken seriously.

I am sure that many of us show films to our students because we feel that they are not as educated about film as they should be I want them to see films and to start thinking about films. The students lack a lot of what we might call "film culture." They have not seen many classic films, and it is important for them to see them. They really love it.

But there is an enormous gap between the kinds of thoughts that we might have about those films, and the thought that are expressed in discussion that we have about the films with the students.

I want to address the issue of how to transform the students' experience of films, which is a somewhat inarticulate, and our thoughts about films which are sometimes a bit too abstract, into something practical. By "practical" I mean something that can affect the students' own work that can actually help to deepen what they are doing. I want to talk about directors, but not necessarily only *auteurs*. I think my ideas also apply to industry directors and any other kind of directors, and I think that the approach we are developing in our school applies to producers, to directors of photography and to editors, as well as to directors.

Specifically, how do you translate students' thoughts and



Alan Bernstein, LFS, London

the teachers' critical judgments, including the full range of critical language and theoretical concepts into something, that make watching films a valuable educational aid in the way that viewing examples does in the other arts. That's the problem.

There is a bad solution, the *auteur theory*, which in my view has had a negative effect on the capacity of students to learn from what they see. Critics like me, and many other people, attribute responsibility for films to the person whose name is on the director credit. We discuss, along the lines of "this film is full of the sense of freedom and impending human potential... you must experience it... it embodies genuine humanist principles." Then, there is a brief pause and you slowly pronounce the name of the director, and in some way that is to serve as an explanation of how all these thoughts got into the film.

It's a plainly profoundly unsatisfactory as a way of making those films accessible for the education of the students. It creates a deep sense of anxiety especially in our script writers, when you question a line that they've inserted in the script to "encourage the sense of impending possibilities of freedom of individuals." Point out that actually it is not a func-

tional line, and you may be in big trouble. In my school at least, students have the right to criticise in a way that can be bad and destructive, so that a generalized inscription of responsibility to the *auteur* is of no use to us. We want the students to look at films, to experience them fully, to think about them, to perceive all the possibilities, all the ideas in the film, and at the same time we want them to see it practically.

I try, first of all to show films whole, so that the students get a sense of what the film is about. In the subsequent discussion, I want to talk about the film in a rich critical language and I want them to respond critical language.

In the next stage, I want them to look at the films closely and carefully, so we have to prepare segments, and show them on a laptop. Now comes the first difficult part. I want there to be a discussion in the class that identifies where in the scene the praiseworthy elements are to be found. I want the students to understand that the elements of a critical discussion must appear somewhere. They don't spring from the head but they come from a social practice. The students are challenged, and they challenge me, to find the specific elements in the scene which in some way embody the active decisions of the filmmakers, and the critical description which they have given to the film. That has two effects. The first effect is to give the students a chance to think about the ways in which the details of the film can embody ideas. The second effect is that it works as a reflection of critical theories, because it very quickly becomes evident that a great deal of the categories that critics use can't actually be identified in terms of things that filmmakers could consider putting in their films. At that point the theories become useless to filmmakers, so it works as a meta-criticism, a criticism of theories, a way of differentiating the kinds of theory that are helpful from those that are not. Without close analysis and discussion, this isn't obvious. There are many kinds of theories, but they have to connect in some way to decisions made by a filmmaker who in some way could have done something different, but chose not.

The next stage is to look on the surface of the film for the elements that are of critical interest. We discuss who did it. My rule is that we do not discuss names, we discuss functions. I want to know what the stu-

dents think, for example "this is a scene of great tact... of great intelligence," or "the way the characters relate to each other, is very moving," or whatever it is. I want them to think about whether that is a function of the script or a function of the direction, quite independently of the screen credits. I want them to look at it in terms of what kind of decisions these are. Are these direction decisions, are they production design decisions, are they lighting decisions, are they script decisions, what kind of decisions are they?

When we achieve that kind of clarity, we can have a very clear discussion about how the effects were achieved. This kind of discussion sheds light on the claims of a "theorist" filmmaking. Did the script with which the director was working serve the decisions made at the level of the director or is it not? The students can have their own discussion which might be "could I write this script as well as someone who is actually a professional screenwriter and has more training and more experience? From that perspective, it is sometimes very easy to convince people to see themselves as directors following their own individual artistic requirements, and in the process of following their own individual artistic desires, they may actually be able to express them more strongly with scripts written by somebody else, than by following own initial desires to write scripts. Or they may not.

It is perfectly obvious in certain films that what the script presents to the director is so precisely tailored, that only the director could have written it, and it seems to me that this is the proper conclusion to some of the discussion about *auteur* versus the separation of roles. The answer is both. There are circumstances in which this is successful, and there are circumstances in which it is not successful. By a rigorous class examination of the texture of the film, you can see very interesting things, for example situations in which the intentions of the screenwriter can be deduced very clearly but that the director has successfully gone against those intentions.

I am very eclectic in the choice of films. I use Spike Lee's films that he has written and that were written by others. I show John Ford films, I show Mizoguchi's work, I screen both classic films and contemporary films, I show von Trier's films. I use some films for different kinds of purposes.

They have to be films that the students should see, and they have to be films that I want to see. Because you have to watch these films very closely with the students, you actually have to care. This is not film history class. It is about a particular kind of critical interpretation. And the teacher has to be very alive, too. You can only use films in this way if you are very sympathetic to the film and to the students. For me it is a way of bridging the gap between theory and practice, a way of giving the students a language in which they can think critically about the films, but in a way, that relates to their own work. It gives them a measure of theory and very often they find themselves moving to the position of theoretical strength as well.



AUTEUR VERSUS PRODUCER

We have worked with the Triangle principle since 1995, and we believe, with success. It gave us the opportunity to improve the different curricula for screenwriting, directing and producing, because time became available for more in depth specialisation. The students of these three disciplines graduate after four years with much more knowledge, strength and self-assurance than before. In many cases the triangles that are formed at school continue after graduation. This makes it much easier to initiate and realise projects in the professional world than in the case of an individual.

The credo of our school is that film is “*ein Gesamtkunstwerk*” by artists of different disciplines. We try to be very consequent in the way we bring our philosophy into practice for example by handling a very strict credit protocol, which forbids the students to take credits like “a film by John Smith” or “a Paul Jones production”. Students may only take credits like “screenplay by ..., directed by ..., produced by...”.

In our opinion it is a mistake to believe that it would be possible to train a “total” filmmaker on a sufficient quality level in four years time. Our experience teaches us that when a student director writes his own script (for us an exceptional case) the final film is – almost as a rule – not as good as it could have been. This is because of his lack of screenwriter skills and an insufficient distance between the two roles as a screenwriter and a director. In the case of a student director writing his own script also the relationship with a student producer is very different from the relationship in a triangle structure. The consequence is often that the student director has a defensive instead of an open attitude towards the student producer, when the latter for example makes suggestions for script improvements. A defensive attitude does not help to create a constructive foundation, a stimulating cooperation by which a project can flourish.

We believe that even when a student director desires to tell film stories of his own only, he is much better off when a student producer and a student screenwriter believe in what he wants to tell and when these two are eager to give all their support to bring the stories to an audience. While the student director is learning how to translate imagination, opinions and words into cinema, the student screenwriter is developing skills to translate ideas and stories into screenplays and the student producer is taught, among other things, how to build and maintain bridges between the student director and the student screenwriter, between the project and the audience and so forth.

From the very beginning in the second year (the first year is a general year) the student producers, screenwriters and directors work in triangles. The way the triangles work develops in three years time. The student screenwriters

initiate the first projects in the beginning of the second year (together with students of Production Design!) and teachers decide which students work with each other. For next projects the student screenwriters, directors and producers first have brainstorming sessions to find shared opinions, ideas and interests. Then triangles are formed on grounds of shared interests. Afterwards the student screenwriters work out first drafts that will be discussed by the triangles. Then the second draft is written, discussed and so forth. For the final films the students are first asked to form triangles, then at the end of March of the third year we “lock them up” for a week in a youth hostel far from their homes where they work out ideas under the guidance of a professional triangle. At the end of that week each triangle has a synopsis for a 25-minute film. The script development takes place in the months following this week “in jail”. At the end of June each triangle has a first draft that is presented to commissioning editors of public broadcasters. In principle a different broadcaster adopts each project. In the fourth and final year about 7 fiction films are made and 5 documentaries that are all broadcasted in a weekly special programming called “Film Lab” on Dutch television.

How do we train our student producers to be compelling partners for student screenwriters and directors in talks about script development? The training of producers in storytelling is a very important issue. The student producers follow for example lessons and sessions in storytelling, film analysis, decoupage techniques and editing theory together with the students of screenwriting and directing. Besides that series of lessons in analysing screenplays are organised especially for the student producers. And of course they take part in the script development sessions with coaches concerning their triangle projects.



THE PRODUCER



Marc Nicolas, LaFémis, Paris

The Producing Student's Film

At La Femis, we have an exercise for our producer students which was designed five years ago to tackle the difference between the situation of the producer within our school and the situation of the producer in the normal world of filmmaking. The main question for us was what conditions to create in order to make students deal with this situation at the very beginning, even before the film it is written or designed by the director, as is the tradition in France.

When it comes to making films at school, I must admit that student producers are mainly production managers. They sometimes take part in script writing, but not enough to be considered even close to the real situation of production. Our idea was to allow these students the possibility of initiating a film project themselves at the end of the curriculum, which means in the third or fourth year. The rules for these producer-driven films are completely different from the other diploma films. First, because they are the single initiators of the project, they can do it with any of the other students at the school. They choose a complete crew, and can use any student in any position.

For the producer's films, we don't have the same system of committees that exists for the other diploma films, for which there are generally three committees: one examining project, another criticising it and a third commenting on it. For the producer's films, there is only one committee, the purpose of which is only evaluation of the presentation of the film. We are trying to put the producing student in the position of a real producer who comes to a TV channel, for instance, to explain his project and gain financial backing. We ask the stu-

dent producer to make a full presentation of the general idea of the film, who will be involved in it, its purpose and its projected audience, in order to place him in a realistic situation.

All of these projects have the same amount of money, which is EUR 8,000, and the use of school facilities, and equipment. It works very well, and we have noticed that these films are very often more actively and intensively supported by the whole crew, and that it sometimes makes them different from the others directed at school. It introduces a different conception of producing and directing films to the school, because of the conditions of choice of the projects and of the crew, and it allows students who are not in the directing department to direct films, which is also important for us because during the second and the third year of our four year curriculum, all the students works at their specialties: cinematographers shoot, sound people work with sound, editors edit, writers write, but, it could happen that some of them really have broader skills or would like to try something else. To open this little window is like bringing fresh air into the school, because it allows people to change places. For example, a student screenwriter may be the director of such a film, and one of the student directors might help him or give advice during editing. It means that for this kind of film, positions are changed, and the school is slightly shaken-up by this form of mini revolution, compared with the usual situation. This is what I could say for general presentation.

Can he/she choose people from outside?

No, but there is an exception concerning former students. So the director of the film could have completed his studies within the past two years. One of the secondary effects

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that it allows people from different study years to work together, which is also something we would like to develop.

What is required for the diplomas?

The diploma year at La Fémis consists of two parts. First the director's diploma film employs all the students, so the first part of their diploma requirement is to take part in the film of a director. The second part is to have their own diploma project, which is typically a kind of thesis about a particular issue in their specialization, and mostly is completed by a film. For instance, last year a cinematographer did something about the question of the light on black skin, when actors of different colours are in a film. It was his subject. He wrote a paper about that and he made a film, which was a practical exercise, in the form of fiction film in fact. As for producers, they have to write a thesis of 50 pages on the subject, and make this kind of producer's film.

EUR 8,000 is not enough to make a film.

Yes, it is enough.

The directors get EUR 15,000, which allows them to shoot 30-minute films. This money is used for two main purposes: the lab, which takes around 60 per cent of the money, and general expenses related to the film – travelling, meals during shooting or things like that.

Are the actors paid?

The actors are mostly not paid, but every student is given the right to hire 6 or 7 days of a professional actor. Mostly, the actors agree to work without pay because most are students from acting schools, especially since we developed an agreement with the main acting school in France two years ago. But the payment of actors is one of our problems because it limits the kind of actors that can be used.

Don't the students of directing get jealous?, don't they care that their money is given to somebody else to direct a film, especially if it is somebody who graduated from the school two years ago, comes back and takes my money and makes my film.

The second question is easier to answer. Yes, of course they are jealous and we like it, because it is one of the ways to make other students of directing realise that they won't be directors one month after leaving the school, and that directing is not only a question of position, it is a question of desire, a question of having a real project and having something to say.. So these films are in fact positive films for us. We have many examples that sometimes it also helps directors to understand what their real position is more deeply. Of course, some of the directors could be chosen to direct producers' films. What we see very often is that the producer selects one of his friends or

fellow students from the school and develops the project with him. They co-write the project. Sometimes it is a three-person team developing the project. In this case, everyone is the closest to his real role, because when they decide to write something together and to develop it, at the same time they have to define the precise role of everyone. This natural definition of the role of the producer, the writer and the director is made easier by the fact that they are free and do what they want. It is only the business of this group of people, not of us, the school.

Alby James

It seems to me that one of the benefits of this free project is that everyone involved is doing so with passion. What the director and other creative members of the team, but especially the director, need to be able to do is to motivate at the same level passion in the professional projects, which frequently are just a job. None of the students wants to produce films that are just jobs, and we all want them to have the same passion. We always say that the free films are often better than the ones for which the school organizes the teams. The challenge for us who set up these teams is how to help to transfer that passion into the other projects which we do, which we must do, for diploma films when there is often more money attached to them.

Marc Nicolas

It would be incorrect to assume that these films are better. I can only say that sometimes they are as good as the others. Sometimes, for some director it makes for a better film because of the situation in which they worked with the writers. But at the same time, I should also say that these films can be worse, and some of them are worse, because the choice was not a good one. Also the decision of the student to direct himself was an error. When you watch the film, you can see that it has so many problems of directing, that the person who directed it is not a director. It is a balance between all these cases, but I view it as a positive balance, in the sense that there are more good films than failures. Another thing is that for some people, who are not directors and who direct films under these conditions, it is an occasion for free experimentation of a kind of cinema.

Marc Nicolas, LaFémis, Paris

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Even though the classical *auteur* idea is now largely behind us in the school, it still is evident in the general production of the school. During the last years these producers' films were the occasions for testing other types of film, comedies or adventures, things like that, which are usually not precisely La Fé-mis' cup of *auteur* tea. But even this changes, and next year there will be one diploma film that is a comedy, which is rare.

Nathalie Degimbe

Our experiences, they are both quite similar and quite different because at our school the triangle is a single. In the same department students all study script writing, directing and producing. They work on three different films, as producer, as a script writer and as director so they discovered the three points of the triangle. It is a great experience for them to have the three different jobs on three different films and that is the first experience of the best kept secrets of our school. A second is the choice of the crew. At IAD the director and the script writer present their project to all technical specializations, and they decide together who is going to work with whom. The crew is always chosen by the director and the script writer and also, in a sense, by the technicians who can choose with whom they wish to work. Of course, each year there are directors nobody wants to work with because they are unbearable, so they also have to learn that in your professional life, you have to work with people you don't like. They also have to learn how to get along with the others. That's a very important experience, too.

Renen Schorr

Am I correct in my understanding that each producing student at La Femis must be a line producer for the director's film, and simultaneously has the option of producing a film in the full sense, meaning he chooses the script, he initiates it, he can choose recent graduates to work on the film? He can do whatever he likes, choose the project and crew whom he is working, about the development of the script from among the teachers. What is his rapport with the school while making this film? Is it his full responsibility?

There is the reality of the project and then there is the control of expenses. It means that if a student is given this amount of

money, he temporarily gets a book of cheques that he may sign but he must report every cent of his expenses. In the last committee to which the film is presented we also require the full budget, describing all expenses of production, decisions about where it is going to be shot, and with whom, and we also look at security questions for instance.

Renen Schorr

What if the script is awful?

Never mind, he can do it. In fact these students are very concerned with the success of their projects. It is very important for them, so they work a lot with other students, and they get advice within the school. They might go to the screenwriting department, and ask for some quick advice about the script, and in fact they are open to criticism, but theoretically it is exactly what you are saying. If it is awful, it could be their fault, but they don't take that risk.

I should add that one of the secondary effects of this kind of film is that it helped to facilitate co-operation between writers and directors.

When I arrived at this school almost three years ago, I discovered a split between writers and directors. Most of the films were not written by screenwriters, and none of the screenwriters had contributed to a director's diploma film. This created a sort of crisis within the screenwriting department and a small crisis among the other department, because while the directing department did not want the obligation for its students to work with a screenwriting student, the screenwriting department wanted it of course. I had to decide what should be done, and as you can imagine, it took hours of discussion. We decided not to make it a requirement, but to find some more subtle ways to help it, and we found some of them. This kind of producing student's film was one of them because on these films it very often happens that regardless of who writes the script, the producer in charge of the film goes to the screenwriting department, finds some students and asks them to help, to give advice or to help in writing dialogue.

During the past three years, more and more screenwriters have been invited to take part in the projects, so we contributed to the solution of this problem. Now almost all the diploma films of the directors are associated in some way with the screenwriters, whether writing or collaborating, or rewriting or rereading. It helped greatly to tackle this question of co-operation between the three roles of producer, director, and screenwriter.



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Tests for Creative Producers

We are opening our producers' curriculum in October this year. Our school will be built on the Triangle principle. We want a triangle format, it means that we have a full curriculum, which is four and a half years and students study directing and cinematography, editing and writing and sound. We would like all three curricula, producing, writing and directing, to mingle and to work together.

Our call for producers is a call for leadership in film, media and culture. We look for the best way to attract young people who usually want to be creative and if they want to make money they go to business management and if they want to make films they go to what seems to be more creative, like directing and writing. Israel is a small country and therefore we think that a film school can be very effective. The task of our school is not only to have better directors, writers, cinematographers and producers, but to change the infrastructure of the Israeli film and television and the media world and it can be achieved more rapidly by strategic producers.

We created a very ambitious programme and we advertise it as leaders in media, film and television. This gave us also big problems of how to make this selection for producers. We thought about it a lot and we are still not happy but we came with concrete exams.

In the first year of the opening of this curriculum we had forty applicants for ten students we accepted. Ninety per cent of them did not wish to be directors. Some of them are definitely a different breed of people that we used to have at school in the past and they are going to change the school by their personalities.

We came to five different tests. We have the usual test for all the programmes, all the curricula of the school where we ask each student to write his CV, if people have some significant past, they get a good mark for it. We ask them to choose one line from their CV and to write it as a story, not as a script but as a story, two pages. And then we see what is their life experience, what is their choice of interest. If the choice is interesting and the way they write it means a lot to the way they perceive themselves and their proportions.

Then we have a test for producers, it is part of all exams for all our students. As for producers we invent new things and we are still searching if we are right. One test is called the pride test. We ask the applicants to write a short story at home in the best conditions, two typed pages, about a thing they did in the past and feel proud of. We want to see how they did something which can be social or artistic or any other thing that they have perspective that they were doing something right and

gained some self-respect about it. That is the personality proportions test.

And there are more concrete tests that are more production oriented. Producing and entrepreneurial producers' tests are the following: one is to view one of the recent Israeli films and we give them a list of ten films of the last two years. And we ask them to make a liaison with other producer, writer or living actor and they should interview him and give us the written edited interview of at least ten pages.

We want them to get to the people. It is a test of how to convince a producer or a director to give two, three, four hours of his time to an applicant. I remember I was in the last Cannes festival and one of the Israeli film producers produced a film which was at many festivals, Walk on Water. He called me and said nine applicants from your school called him and wanted to interview him. I said choose one and say no to the others. And everyone found another director or producer, or writer or actor or actress who they interviewed. So it is the test to pick up the phone and convince someone who is busy to give part of his time. And then the question is that they should interview this top guy from current film and understand the sense of the film, present it in that interview on ten pages.

The creative issue of it is that they have to present us their own version of a potential DVD that they are going to release about the film. Not only the film itself, which should be a DVD, but the bonuses, if they think it interesting to make the DVD sexy. It means they should view several DVDs, Israelis and non-Israelis to see how DVDs are working as bonuses and be creative and original and suggest their own view of how the DVD will sell.

They should understand the core of the film not by viewing the film but also by speaking to one of its leading people and I must admit that the results of these tests are usually the DVDs were sold out. These films were better in many cases than the DVDs that were on the market.

In another test, which was less rewarding, we gave them three options, again from current films that they have seen, most of them very successful. We spoke with the graphic

Renen Schorr, JSFS, Jerusalem

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designers of these films and gave them three options of a poster. And we asked them the following. The producer decided to go for this option, what is your decision. If you go for the producer's decision analyse it and back it. If you think he was wrong and your choice is a better one, please view the film, viewing the producer's decision, please make your own choice and analyse it, give its pros and cons. It was a big production to get all these options for posters.

The last test, and we also translated it, is what we call the Bible quiz. This test was done at school. All the rest were done at home. The applicants were given the Bible and we asked them to choose a biblical story that left an impression on them and they think it can make something in the media, they should make a choice what would be the adaptation, it can be a fifty minutes' drama, a full length feature, a DVD, a series, an animation series, internet, whatever they think and they should provide a good argument why this would be the right media for this story. They should convey the story they want to clarify from the biblical story in one sentence what is the synopsis of the story. They can choose the director, it can be Israeli or other, living or dead. And then the cast, the leading parts, Israeli or other, living or dead. It is the idea of one of our teachers and I liked it very much because we are a small country with a difficult language, it is hard to sell and with no Israeli stars. The idea that you are a producer potentially, a candidate, and you can think big, and you can cast Sean Connery for Noah, for example. And Tarantino can be the director or you can make a mélange of Israeli actors and international actors. And you can ask Billy Wilder to come from the grave and write and direct your biblical story. It broadens their imagination, their mind and the same is used for casting. You can choose current actors, living actors, definitely dead actors, a mélange of both, local, international, and you can also see the film tradition and knowledge of the applicant. If someone writes Tarantino, you can also gather that his knowledge in film and television tradition is quite current. If someone writes Sean Connery and Gulietta Massina for Noah's story, this is more interesting. So this test was very funny. So this is the list of tests for the creative producers.

In the other options for the school, the directors or writers, we don't allow everyone to pass to the interview phase. We reject about fifty or sixty per cent of the applicants and let about forty per cent to pass for the interview phase. In the producers' curriculum this year, also because it was for the first year, we wanted to see everyone. So whatever people wrote in these home or school tests, we wanted to see the people, to understand who is coming and secondly we think that as a producer you should have something from everything. The charisma of an applicant is very important. So we wanted to see the sparkle in the eyes, their passion, energy, body language.

They did this for the first time we had to advertise that there is such a curriculum, that there is something good in producing, for producers in our country.

Did you afterwards get any sense that these very different tests produce similar results? Do the same patterns of students do well in all the tests, or was there a great variation between who did well in some tests and who did in other tests.

There were two candidates who received top marks in every test. And after seeing them I said to myself and to my colleague that we open this curriculum for this kind of people. Because it is not only the tests, it is only when you see them in the interview that this is it. As for the rest there were contradictions in the tests but I must say that it is the same in our other curricula. You should not necessarily have high marks in everything. In most of them or half of them at least you should have.

If you get candidates who do well in some tests and badly in other tests how do you actually decide which ones are the best ones? How do you break the ties?

It means that in the interview phase they should be really good. Then the factor of the interview is more important. If the tests are very good, but you know that people are nervous at the interview so that it is not the only factor, but we can't get students without an interview. In case that the tests are all right or not really very good, the interview is more important. Before the candidates enter we remind ourselves of his profile, his pros and cons in the former test and the questions we should ask. But it means that he/she should have a very good or excellent interview in order to enter.

There are five written tests and one interview?

The interviewing committee consists of those people who read the tests. They can be very concrete when they ask. There are three people in the committee – producer/teacher from school, director-producer/not acquainted with the school, and me.

How long does it take to do the written tests?

Three weeks. There is a deadline for registration for every

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programme. We give the tests at the same time three to four weeks before the end of the registration period and then they have another two weeks. Those who registered in the last moment have less time. We recommend in our bulletin that they register at least three weeks before the deadline.

There will be some changes, in the tests but we want to wait at least one semester to see the results of the people at school and then to rewrite some of the tests. I think that 60-70 per cent of the tests will stay the same. And about 1/3 will change.

János Xantus

We are quite new to the market economy. This spring, a new film law was passed, and everything is just starting. Should we focus on business skills, or on a desire for self-expression, or to tell a story? We should focus on the latter. At present, we do not have a class for producers, but we have courses for production managers.

The head of the last producers course was Janos Szasz, who is a cinematographer, director and producer. The vice-head, who spent more time with the students than Janos himself, was a professor of screenwriting. She spent lots of time with the students analysing scripts, talking about stories, and viewing films, because she thinks that business skills can be learnt much more easily, and these few years the students spend at the university might be the last chance for them to read a novel and talk about it.

It is very important that producers really are equal partners of directors. Actually there are some good results from this kind of training. In our last class of producers, there is a very good young director and a great young producer who started to work together during the school years, and they are still working together. They have had lots of success. The producer herself is part of the writing team. There is also another example from the last class of producers, a producer who became a director. First he directed a few short films, and now he came with his own feature film. This is an example of where creative approach can lead you.



Renen Schorr, JSFS, Jerusalem

SCHOOL 'S HYDE PARK

Zuzana Gindl-Tatárová, VŠMU, Bratislava

Every teaching story is a personal story, and each of us who has been employed in any film or television studio or industry has his or her own style of dealing with creative work. But we have never been taught how to teach.

I was asked to become a teacher at VŠMU just after the political changes in 1989. Some students came to me and asked me to teach them. A great honour, wasn't it? I said: "OK, but I need to invent my own way to tell you about films and what issues I can deal with."

This wasn't easy, because our society was going through two fundamental changes at the same time. We had moved from one social system into a completely different one, from socialism straight into a market economy, and from an artificial bloc economy to the rough economic and cultural globalisation of the world. We somehow needed to change the perspectives of the people from those of the previous regime to new ones. The state stopped being a producer of feature films, and filmmakers themselves needed to learn to be producers. And this transformation had to occur at other levels as well. To step across this border was a quite tough job.

In my lecture I referred to the lessons of the famous Professor Brousil, who taught at FAMU in Prague during my own student days. He would screen films, and then all students of the school would come to discuss them. When I saw fresh newcomers without any point of view, coming mostly from grammar schools where the teacher was always right, which by the way was the main illness of the whole society, I decided to help them find their own opinions, both in creative work and if possible, in civic attitudes, too. I hated their fear of speaking so much that sometimes I was really naughty with them. I provoked them, and shouted "Please, oppose me a little bit! This is not the way to be yes-men all the time! It's very opportunistic, you know?! How would you like to create films this way? Your attitudes are not a luxury, they are your duty to the future audience!"

My lecture had some other goals. I wanted to make students, especially newcomers, acquainted with older students and their opinions, to recognize and choose their collaborators for the shooting teams that would



be formed later on, and I wanted them to be able to compare their points of view in an easy, spontaneous way.

I would give them a five-ten minute long introduction, to put the director and the screened film into a brief context. (Context is an important word, isn't it?) The screening followed, and then we had at least one hour or more to analyse it - in many levels. The first one was always the level of context. It's not just the context of the director's history and his environment, but it was mostly a search for what the author wanted to tell us. Then, of course, come the level of structure, genre, and main characters, their inter-actions and relationships, etc. At the end of this analysis, students need to point out if the author has succeeded in communicating his idea, if he has used this particular structure, this genre, these main characters, etc. effectively.

So this was the first impulse of how to start. But I recognized later on, that not only students, but my colleagues and sometimes my friends were coming to participate, as well as students from other schools like the Academy of Fine Arts or the Philosophical Faculty of Comenius University. They were sitting among my real students and discussing openly all the problems tied up in the film. Some sociological, demographical, political or psychological aspects were addressed, too. Things were put into an even wider context, and the whole status of our newly reformed society was analysed. It was very helpful, and I decided to open my lecture to everybody.

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I used to be very unhappy that some participants were disturbing my screenings by coming late. And later on they didn't respond to questions because hadn't seen the whole film. So I started to behave like a military commander. "OK guys", I said, "I will begin the lecture with a short introduction, then I will lock the door when first titles of the film come on." If you want to teach dramaturgy, the structural and emotional development of the film story, nobody could disturb it.

Pretty soon a funny habit was evident every Friday morning as people ran to the school to be on time. I was running from my side, they were running from their side. We were smiling, but at nine o'clock we were sitting in the class ready for the lecture.

Another point is that it isn't easy for the teacher as moderator to keep things going. You need to recognise every student in a personal way. You need to know their characters, weaknesses and possibilities to be helpful all the time, no matter what their age. You even dare not stay up late the night before, because you need to be fit and prepared to moderate such an organism wisely and carefully, and give everyone the space to speak and explain his or her opinions.

I have sometimes met students with very specific problems. One student from the script-writing class was suffering from schizophrenia. He fought with me all the time, trying to be on first name terms with me, and speak to me in the informal tense. In English there's no difference in the degree of formality between "you" singular and "you" plural, but in our language it was very impolite for him to use "you" singular, because teachers should be addressed formally.

I told him "OK darling, you can speak in singular to me, if you need to, but let me to decide to use plural in our communication." He used to sit at the very back of the room, in a distanced position but in front of my eyes, and he was always muttering something aloud and shaking his shoulders in a gesture of opposition. Once, he changed his mind about where to sit and he sat himself to my right side. And you know, if you address any audience, it is better to have them in front of you. Your energies directly engage theirs. But if someone sits to the side, you aren't covered, and he can easily hit you with his bad energy. So I asked this guy: "Listen, I don't mind that you mumble and oppose all the time, that's fine, but would you be so kind as to take your chair and move back to your old place? I am used to your opposition from that particular side". He smiled and went back, and from that time on he started to be very helpful and constructive in our analysis. And I thought that might be for any teacher.

Sometimes the class is very lazy and silent, then I provoke them by a false statement. If they agree, if they say YES, I am naughty again: "That's not true, it's not YES, but NO! Hell, haven't you got any brains? You need to oppose me if I am kidding. This is not the proper way for future filmmakers!" They finally recognize that in this discussion space they can speak in public about whatever they really want.

Sometimes they debate with me without any concrete arguments. I always tell them: "OK, what you mean may be really interesting, but you need to prove it with proper reasoning, based on the film. Otherwise the crappy professor's truth remains the only one that's valid here."

One girl, for example, didn't accept my analysis of *Barton Fink* by the Coen brothers. She was a very special and strange personality, a little bit crazy, so I said: "OK, give us your point." "I am ashamed," she said, "there are a lot of people around and I simply cannot..." I asked her to write it down for me. So she wrote her statement down over the course of two weeks, and she brought me the paper, and she was right according to her particular point of view. I promised her to tell it to other students, but she stopped me: "No, no, I don't want you to tell them. I am just very happy you have recognised my being right..." You could solve things with nearly every student in more or less similar way, but it will cost a lot of your energy.

But now to the point: We have recognised that we desperately need to prepare a completely new generation of producers who will be creative, who can recognise quality, who have learned how to analyse films and how to pick up the main idea of the film so as to strengthen its message.

Every year I am given around twenty newcomers, producers and managers for my class, not counting some other departments like Documentary or Animation. I simply cannot manage that many students at once. That's why I am focusing mostly on producers nowadays. As for scriptwriters, directors or editors, my lecture is a must. We analyse films together, and if they don't agree with the director's solutions in some scenes or sequences, the students are sent out of room and asked to prepare their own version of the scene or sequence. They are taught to work together constructively.

And this is a point of view. To criticise just by their feelings is really very simple, but if they need arguments and they need to be creatively constructive, the situation is completely changed. This is my way to teach producers to respect the contribution of others and, yes, how to recognize the meaning of quality.



VISUAL LANGUAGE

CONFRONTING THE TWIN CHALLENGES OF IGNORANCE AND THE SEDUCTION OF TECHNIQUE

Roger Crittenden, NFTS, Beaconsfield

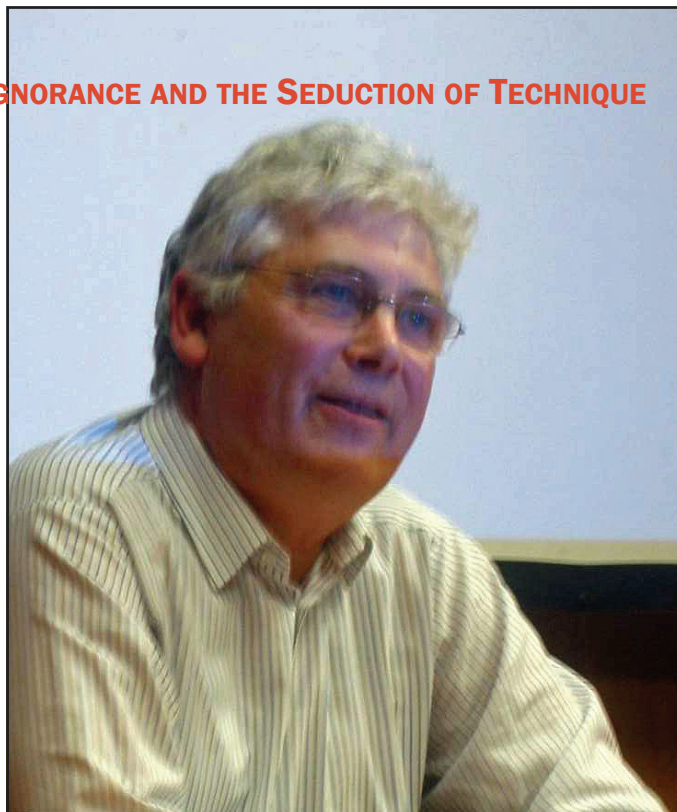
I realised that actually, we are avoiding the fact that the best kept secret in our film schools is our fear. We fear whether we are doing anything properly, whether we get the students we want, whether we can teach them anything, and our fear whether what we are doing is of any significance. I was reminded of an American feature with Gene Hackman, I can't remember the title or anything much more about the film, except that it is a thriller about lawyers. Hackman is an old lawyer, and his daughter is also a lawyer. The plot reveals the fact that for the first time in their two careers they actually meet as adversaries in the courtroom. They've been quite estranged, and they come together and have a proper conversation for the first time in many years.

She says: "So how are you daddy? How are you really?"

He says: "Well, nothing's changed after 35 years. I still wake up every morning, and I think this is the day I am gonna be found out."

And I think that for me, after 33 years in film school, there is still fear, in the sense that there are different ways of doing things and some of them work more or less better than others, but in the end, in a sense, we just cross our fingers.

Our methodologies may become more and more sophisticated, but not necessarily better. I remember a couple of years ago Paul Schrader was on the stage of the National Film Theatre, and in the question and answer period at the end of his talk, he was asked "so where are the new great filmmakers going to come from?" You may know that Schrader studied at UCLA in the sixties. His immediate response was "Well one thing is for certain, not from film schools. From minorities, including women, from the disadvantaged, from the deprived, from those people who still have energy and passion. And they will do it in whatever way they do it, and it certainly won't be through film schools." That was a salutary statement at the time.



But I want to discuss what might not necessarily be the best kept secret, but something else, that for me is a problem that has to have solutions.

I want to suggest that the digital revolution alongside a widespread lack of knowledge of the past of visual storytelling has created a conceptual vacuum for our students, which brute nature fills with the detritus of superficial hamburger movies. Point of view is often not even on the agenda, thus making the use of visual language inchoate.

When I first visited the most recent incarnation of the French National Film School, La FEMIS, in its first home at the Palais de Tokyo, I remember trying to judge what sort of institution this new incarnation might be. Before going to dinner with colleagues, I happened to browse amongst the notices in the reception area.

Amongst the usual cultural announcements was a series of sessions, which stood out as unique. My approximate translation of the title was: Computers, their Language and Influence on Cognitive Processes. Intrigued, I struggled to decipher the accompanying French text. The crux of the argument seemed to be that all students of creative expression should be aware that the way basic computer language is designed affects our thinking processes. There seemed to be an implication that using these machines modified the structure of self-expression, and encouraged a shift in the creative mind-set. If nothing else the result could be, so the argument went, a deep homogenisation of attitudes.

It is not surprising that the French, with their steadfast

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protection of the “Cultural Imperative,” a philosophy, which lies behind many years of economic and political support for their National Cinema, would be wary, if not paranoid of any and every source of possible infection that threatens the exceptional nature of French Culture. The question haunted me then and still does now. I happen to accept the statement that no technology is neutral.

Nor is it a question of the new technology. The problem has existed at least since man first sharpened a flint. Humphrey Jennings, for some the only poet British Cinema has so far produced, left behind him after his sad demise, the material from his research into the effects of the Industrial Revolution or the coming of the machine, based entirely on contemporary accounts. It was eventually edited into a book by Mary-Lou Jennings and Charles Madge and published in 1985 as *Pandemonium*.

Pandemonium refers to a place of confusion. It was Milton's term for hell. We could say a place of ‘sound and fury – signifying nothing’. For Jennings the Industrial Revolution created a human hell. Not only did this happen literally in the creation of urban environments that subjected the mass to a depraved existence as wage slaves in service of the new machines, but also spiritually, in that mechanistic laws replaced the imagination in support of an evolving culture that can sustain human society above an animalistic level.

Neither the industrial revolution nor the subsequent technological one is reversible, except through their collapse. The problem is that whilst we can clean up the more obvious side effects of industrial activity, because the more subtle influences of the functioning of modern technology remain insidiously hidden, we are unable to take evasive action.

To speak plain: we are not only sorcerers apprentices, we are slaves of the sorcery itself. The image of a computer in a mud hut is frightening not because of its apparent anachronistic appearance – it is terrifying because the effect on the user is not subject to easy analysis or to remedy. At least when the Wizard of Oz spoke from within his machine it was easy to recognise the inhumanity, but he had to be forced to come out from behind to achieve a sympathetic relationship with Dorothy and her friends.

How does this relate to our teachers of cinema? The development of new technologies and thus new ways of getting images on the screen forces us to add elements to our curriculum. On the other hand the fact that students are familiar with everything to which the computer and the internet can give access, means that they enter our schools often with too much knowledge or more precisely too much information of a superficial kind.

Our response to this can tend to be more remedial than creative. By responding in this way we can be perceived as the keepers of some past wisdom, which the new generation rejects as out of date and backward looking.

When I interviewed Michal Leszczylowski, the editor of Tarkovsky's ‘The Sacrifice’, and now editing tutor at the Swedish Dramatic Institute, he said that he deliberately tells his students that they are very unlucky to be starting out in this era when the predominant source of their visual education is television. The previous generation benefited from a deep knowledge of cinema and prior to that, knowledge of the wider cultural spectrum, which allowed filmmakers to be inspired by all of art. The truth is that we are now faced with a generation that doesn't even watch television beyond MTV unless they are hooked by soap operas and reality shows.

It is possible that people of my generation are unable to bridge the gap between classical cinema and the artefacts that are now being produced. Even visual expression, especially in the narrative area, is going through a major transformation, which we should treat as part of cultural evolution. Why don't I believe that? We must hold on to the values of a good story told well and effectively from a clear point-of-view and involving characters whose motivation and dramatic journey is part of the contract we have with our audience, even if Jean-Luc left this all behind a long time ago.

The bottom line for me is that the values I have referred to are still the best place to start from and our curricular strategies must embrace them at all cost. Cultural ignorance in the face of seductive technology is eroding our ability to re-invigorate the medium. In my opinion the result is likely to be the erosion of all specific cinema, and films will become merely a marketing tool for the latest computer game. Our schools must function to help prevent this catastrophe.

For example: the first exercise that our students do in fiction is based on taking a scene from great films, and simply giving the students the few pages of that scene and asking them to interpret the scene. This may be something that other schools have tried. What is so sad is that the students almost never recognise the original film. In one sense this exercise is unfair, because the context of the scene is not given.

How do you make it, really? What do you give the students?

We simply give them the pages of the script, in this case translated. So that is another hidden element. We move Bertolucci's *Ultimo Tango a Paris* from Paris to London. So

that's all they have. They have a text.

Are they allowed to invent things that are not in the script?

They are allowed to interpret as broadly as they need to in order to keep to the spirit on the page. There is a space for the director to enter.

How many students do the work?

There are 6 directors and we usually offer 3 different scripts. We change them every year to give us a new inspiration. It is the first thing they do, after a few weeks of basic training.

Who is interpreting the scenes? Who are the actors?

Professionals.

Did they have any lessons before, working with actors?

Yes, the directors will have had some work with actors, and some basic *mise en scène* classes.

How much time of shooting is for this exercise?

A day and a half.

Renen Schorr, JSFS, Jerusalem

We have the same exercise, but it is scheduled the beginning of the second year. Each student does the exercise. We give them five or six scene options and a day of shooting. It is done less elegantly, but the interpretations are more extreme. We encourage the students to make it strange or different, and that would be the hard core of the director's work. The production is less lavish, and the film language is less, but they might choose two old ladies to interpret the scene, or they might set it in a poor neighbourhood. It will not be just the simple interpretation. We encourage them to change the text.

Roger Crittenden

The whole point of the assignment is to study the language. In the past we did another exercise in a hotel room, and in that case a director staged it all in one shot. It was very interesting.

Renen Schorr

Yours is more a film language exercise. The way we do it is more about radical interpretation. We also use outside locations.

Roger Crittenden

Usually our students have a choice of an exterior scene. We think that it is best for

the students to find things, which are on the paper. The subtext is hidden, often by an auteur who knew exactly what his subtext was going to be, but that produces very interesting results, especially when the comparison is made with the original.

Doing this exercise early is one way of leading them back into the history of cinema. Quite often, after seeing the film from which the exercise was taken, the student director would say "I would never have thought of looking at that director's movies," and suddenly, by doing it themselves, by re-looking at it, or even discovering it for the first time, their minds are opened.

So this is the first exercise. What is the second one?

Without words.

What kind of tutoring or monitoring is on this exercise? Are the students left alone?

There is discussion before, but here is no interference during the shoot, there is a lot of discussion afterwards. The exercise itself runs for four weeks in total, two weeks preparation, a week of shooting, and a week of editing. Cinematography students shoot it. It's an exercise between the directing, producing, and cinematography students. The locations sound people work on it as well. They are given a quick crash course. There is no production design involved. They basically dress the set themselves. It's a very quick exercise from that point of view. .

Renen Schorr

In the second year our students do an exercise which draws from the choice of a location, or text and syntax, and in the third year they do genre exercise, for they write an original text for a very concrete location, before beginning their diploma film. The script should be directed in two styles: generically, as in a conventional studio *film noir*, and in the open free style inspired by the *nouvelle vague*. It is very challenging. It is the same text with the same actors, done as an exercise in genre and style. Two totally juxtaposed styles: the studio style and the open free style. It is very interesting, because it gives the students a deep insight into these ways of thinking. Most of their films are more influenced by modern cinema and by the heritage of the *nouvelle vague*, but many of them make parodies of a film noir, but there are some interesting paranoid projects, for which there is a lot of space in Israel. It is highly interesting, because it is their last exercise before diploma film and it is the only exercise. We invite a teacher who has been doing it for the last 12 or 13 years. She is a cinematographer from France, and she is with them all the time. She is there to give them the moment-to-moment know-how of the set and the linkage between all departments and this year one of the best films of that class is the *nouvelle vague*-inspired film. It is fresh, and unlike the school films, which are very much constructed, very free in style, and spirit.

(cont'd on p.36)

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Our screenwriting teachers tell our student writers that they must give a very short description of the scenery and the location and that they must write the dialogue and describe the action. They teach the students that one page is equal to one minute of screen time, so 90 pages of script is about right for a 90-minute film.

A month ago a student arrived in my office with a 250 page script. In these 250 pages, he described the colour of the sky, the colour of the environment, the speed of movement, and so on, all in exquisite detail. He came to me quite upset and said: "I had many problems when I spoke with the production committee about production money because they refused the script. He told me that they said to him "this is not a *Drehbuch*, but it is a *Bilderbuch*" (it is not a script, but it is a picture book.)

I said "that's a wonderful compliment," and posed some basic questions, and then I tried to give him some very simple and practical exercises and advice about our approach to strengthening the visual elements of film. My basic fundamental is who creates the images? If screenwriting teachers are teaching students how to write, and require that they submit dialogue and a list of locations, then is it the screenwriter who creates the image? And if he is not, then who does? Is the Director of Photography the person who creates the image when he gets the script and meets the director and says "ok, let us do it in this way or that way?"

I am very grateful that someone proposed the idea of another Triangle, the triangle of Director of Photography, director, and designer. I think it is a very necessary triangle. Dick Ross wrote a wonderful small article about dialogue and he called it "Mary is Beautiful and 25". If this is the kind of description you read in the script then there is an obvious problem of visualisation. If you read in the script the wonderful line "John's answer makes Mary very sad or disappointed," with a little bit of imagination, the director can find a photograph of John and shoot Mary destroying it.

But is this the kind of visualisation we are talking about? We have several exercises and lessons, which sound very simple, and we start with them very early in our curriculum to give directing students the feeling what it means to define initial terms. In **the first exercise** they get small TV cameras and their task is to spend a day outside, find an interesting person, and watch this person with the camera. If he wants to elaborate the assignment, he can watch this person so that there is always a kind of window between him and this person. He may be sitting with someone else in a café and the camera is outside, looking through a window. There is only visual level of information. We don't hear what they are talking about, or what kind of encoun-

ter it is, but you see it. Before they begin the assignment, I tell them "Stay with one person, and with any luck, the person will have several encounters. Bring about 20 or 30 minutes of material. We don't edit the material, and we look at it as documentary footage. We systematically analyse what this documentary material tells us, visually, about the person, about the surroundings, why we think this person is in what kind of mood, what the person's clothes tell us, and what the body movement in the encounter tells us. Suddenly many of the students discover how very rich visual information can be. Without any dialogue, without any lines, we see and make our own interpretation. We have feelings and emotions about this person, and this is the very first lesson at the beginning of the directing curriculum.

The second lesson uses a special selection of film excerpts that we show to the students; films like *Exotica*, *Toute une nuit*, *Sånger från andra våningen* (Songs from the Second Floor,) *Paris, Texas*, *Nostalgia* or something similar. We explore what emotional and cognitive information we get from the scene. There is no text, no line of dialogue. What is Atom Egoyan telling us visually in the scene from *Exotica*, and what are the elements he uses? Suddenly, lighting, camera movement, body movement, and the importance of environment become obvious, and finally the students realise that visual information or visual communication is an indirect language. The clothes of a person tell about mood, the movement of the camera tells about the relation between persons. Compare this with a bad example: Mary is sad or Mary is disappointed, so she stands up and looks up at the camera and says "I am so disappointed." If the students understand that film is a wonderfully indirect language, and that the colour of the environment tells more about the subject's emotional situation than any words can express, with any luck, we are on a good path.

The third lesson is a small exercise. I don't know if I can express it correctly in English, because it is based on verbal language, and of course we work in German. We take one of the situations from our documentary material, one of the situations from the fiction film excerpts, and I ask the students to look for the people on the screen in both of the

previous exercises to show a similar relationship and express it in a single word. The word should be a verb which expresses movement.

The most interesting thing about verbal language is that often it is a pictorial language. So when we say in German *zurückziehen*, it means to withdraw or to back-track, but it does not only mean to go back in physical movement, but also in your own soul and in your own heart, or to turn away from somebody, or to close all doors. This kind of expressions characterise the important emotional situation of the scene. I tell the students to find the single word, and when they have found this one word, we ask them to take the camera, and using two actors, express the word with camera framing and movement. Doing it only with the movement of the camera requires the students to combine emotion with motion. This is a very interesting and important lesson, and we work for one week just to learn how you can visualise things you don't see, emotions that don't directly appear on the screen.

Let us return to the idea of what is written in the script. You will recall that Mary is very disappointed. I ask the students how they as directors translate this to the screen. They say "OK, We'll try to find some lines or something else? Maybe she smashes her glasses on the ground."

And then I say "be careful, because all the characters in the scene have a kind of agenda. Maybe she has to go to the toilet, or maybe she has to cross the street. You don't have to add anything, but use their agenda to express emotions. So you can show what her mood is in the way Mary crosses the street. It is very important because at the beginning of our classes, the script writers or the directors think that they have to find something very special to express mood and add it to the agenda of the character. We say, please don't add anything to the agenda. Use their normal agenda to express their emotion.

The fourth exercise is very important for me. It is an exercise of directors, directors of photography, and set designers. Again it sounds very simple. We scout locations. We try to find a location for a written scene. It is very interesting, because first of all I really believe there are a kind of archetypes for locations, environments or surroundings, so you can find an island in a megalopolis, you can find hell in some places, but what is interesting is when we look at these loca-

tions, the first idea is to find very picturesque situations, very extreme situations. Abandoned industrial environments are always at the top of students' list. Might there be a simpler way of expressing the emotional situation of our actors than this scenery?

The second step we try to discuss the idea that the location should illuminate. Remember Mary? Mary is very sad and she goes to the seaside in the autumn. The sky is almost dark, and the leaves are falling from the trees, and so forth. So the location starts to illustrate a very unique emotional situation, and when they find the visual location for this scene, I ask the students to find the counterpoint.

I am very interested in having visual narration with a counterpoint. I often show the students the opening scene of *Minnie and Moskowitz* by John Cassavetes, because if students are asked to show loneliness, they seat their character somewhere on a bridge. or somewhere else where they are always alone. To show loneliness, the character has to be alone. But if you watch the first scene of *Minnie and Moskowitz*, you see that loneliness is in the crowd. He is going from one part of New York to the other. He touches people and saying 'come on, be with me', and he is quite depressive. And at the end of this trip, you see that he is the loneliest guy in New York. Working with counterpoints is the point of this lesson when we begin searching for locations.



Cont'd from p.34

Anke Zwirner

In the second year in our school in Potsdam, there is a short genre film, which the producing students develop together with the script writing and the directing students. This year we just started film noir so we can exchange films noirs.

Renen Schorr

For us, it is the same script, the same actors, but two different directors .and all in the class are changing their roles. The one who was the cinematographer in one film holds the boom in the other, the one who was an assistant cameraman will do continuity, etc. so all the class is witnessing these two options and they all do the rough cut in editing throughout the workshops, and at the end they and the teacher can see ten drafts, and they can also juxtapose the two exercises. It is very interesting.

BUILDING THE MUSCLES OF IMAGINATION

FINDING SERENDIPITY IN CREATIVITY



Each of us who teach aspiring filmmakers constantly strives to discover a process that will ensure that our talented student filmmakers will become creative and consistently successful filmmakers, but we all know that there is no magic formula. We know, too, that sometimes, in the course of our striving or, sometimes, playing, discoveries happen by accident.

The foundation for the work of my course team and, therefore, the future success of our graduates in the practical world of film and television, is our belief that creativity must be linked to an understanding of both craft and market. While the teaching of craft skills and the forging of links between students and practitioners is useful for enhancing students' understanding of the market, I have increasingly become frustrated and impatient with the poor level of originality and genuine creativity in students' work, so I have been devoting more time to stimulate greater creativity in students' approaches to their work. After all, I tell my colleagues and students, 'structure', for example, means little without creativity, and when producers talk about creativity they usually mean: Is it fresh? Is it original? Is it different? Is it unique?

And, of course, it also means to them questions associated with marketability: Am I immediately engaged by the premise? Is it compelling? Will the audience connect with it?

From the first week onwards we expose our students to examples of great creativity through screenings and discussions of the work of many great film makers, and we also pursue exercises that get them thinking creatively as soon as possible. For example, on day one I begin with the following:

A young black man with untidy dreadlocks is running down a hilly street towards a busy main road in a middle-class suburb. He's running so fast that he knocks people over if they get in his way. Behind him a policeman is running, too. The bystanders look horrified as they pass and some shout, "Stop him, quick!" Further up the hill a thirty-something white woman stands screaming as other people try and comfort her.

I explain that I suspect that most of them think that this young man is a criminal trying to get away. He fits the type, doesn't he? He's young and black, has untidy dreadlocks, is in an urban, middle-class setting and is running desperately. And with a policeman a little distance behind him it really does look as if he's trying to get away from the law, having done something to the distressed white woman further up the hill.

I continue that in many stories it would be quite necessary for me to use this stereotype of the young black man because in our culture it serves as a short cut to communicate this idea to the audience. Especially when I want to be *descriptive* (i.e., when I want to express the way things are). But when I want to be *prescriptive*, to suggest the way things could be, or let the audience know that I want to take them on a journey of the imagination, I wouldn't want to reinforce that cultural shorthand. So, starting with the stereotype, and being creative, I'd make the audience think again by going further. Here's the

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rest of the sequence.

Further down the hill a small child is rattling towards the main road in a runaway pushchair. The policeman tires and collapses. The young black man is tired, too, but he's desperate. The busy traffic is now very close. He puts on a spurt and gains on the pushchair. He manages to grab a handle of the pushchair just before it reaches the main road. Holding it tight he throws himself to the ground. The pushchair clatters on top of him, the child falls safely in his arms. A passing truck blasts its horn. The watching crowd applauds.....

With this scenario I show how to break the stereotype, and how to think creatively. The young black man is presented as brave and heroic and the audience knows straightaway that this story is not going to treat black people in a stereotypical way. They will be open to a journey of discovery.

The great British theatre director Peter Brook coined the phrase, 'new truths are found when stereotypes are broken'. New truths, I explain, are what I expect them to seek and uncover, so I beg them to question their use of stereotypes. Screenwriting guru Robert McKee says that writers who know their craft know how to cure clichés. They do so by writing several different versions of, say, the boy meets girl meeting scene because they never trust inspiration. Inspiration, he says, 'is the first idea picked off the top of your head, and sitting on the top of your head is every film you've ever seen, and every novel you've ever read offering clichés to pluck'.

Flowing from this introduction, I ask them to think of a character. I ask them to be certain about him or her, his wants and needs, how he or she is dressed, what he or she is doing. I then tell them that the character leaves the building and walks down the road. While passing an open car park I say that the character hears someone a woman scream. I ask them what does their character do?

I ask them to think of another character. Of course, they are trying to be clever now, and they think they will have good

responses to my surprising suggestions. I tell them that their character is going to the gym to the car park with a gym bag. Shock, horror! There's a dead body in the boot of the car! It is the dead body of a friend! I ask the students whether their character would phone the police, or try and get rid of the body without anyone knowing? I ask them to think about whether their character really has nothing to hide. I remind them that most murders are committed by someone who knows the victim I ask them to think carefully about their character, and be sure to make the right decision.

In the next two weeks I ask them to think about themselves as characters for a film and to prepare a presentation of their backstories. I remind them that potentially, everyone is interesting and instruct them to begin by thinking about the turning points in their own lives, the moments that have made them what they are. I bring up the philosophy of existentialism, and how its essence is that 'we are the sum of our actions'.

These presentations are wonderful moments, in which they identify the beauty as well as the horrors of their lives and how they connect with the rest of us, their audience, when they go deeply into their own history. These moments of discovery are often serendipitous. And it is this accident of discovery by the unexpected consequence of two ideas or characters meeting in unusual circumstances that led me to seek other ways to explore creativity through play. So, mixed among the screenwriting and basic filmmaking craft sessions and the sessions in which we pursue script development or talk through the coverage the directors have in mind for their film shoots, we also run creativity sessions where their task is simply to enjoy themselves in play through letting their imaginations run riot. To prime them for these sessions, we show them films that we think express creativity superbly, and we wax lyrical about the joy of art and why creativity matters. Bernardo Bertolucci's films are wonderful for this but so is the Sam Mendes' first film, *American Beauty*, in which the cheerleaders scene or the scene in which the two young lead characters watch the film of the paper bag dancing in the wind, are good examples of moments when the creator's imaginations are inspiring.

I want to nurture greater recognition among my colleagues of what this means and to ensure that our students' screenplays and films should both reflect and seek to advance the art of cinema. The medium in which student screenwriters may enjoy being creative artists without the constraints of commerce is the short film. The short film is a form in which the

filmmakers are not expected to conform to commercial imperatives. It can present new challenges to the viewer, offering the screenwriter a unique opportunity to develop his or her artistry, explore new possibilities for narrative and find bold and original combinations of form and content. The short film is character-driven, and not controlled by action.

For the past two years we've had a forum in which the pursuit of creativity is explored more methodically. It is led by Emma Adams, a former student, whose own creativity is a combination of the imaginations of Ken Russell, Terry Gilliam and Jean-Pierre Jeunet. While an MA student she wrote some extraordinary works and directed *Ripe* a short film which was funded by the UK Film Council's New Cinema Fund's Digital Shorts scheme.

She developed the script in the second half of her first year.

Writing and directing a predictable film is not possible for her to do. To foster greater opportunities for serendipity in the creative development of our students, we designed the following programme together:

Theme for the week is THE IDEA'S GENERATOR

1. Aims of the week:

- a. Providing a holistic creative tool-kit.
- b. Establishing a greater awareness of the possibilities of their art and how craft skills may aid them.
- c. Encouraging and stimulating creative relationships.
- d. Providing supportive development skills and techniques.
- e. Introducing new ideas and ways of thinking about their work and creativity.

2. Tangible results that students will take from the week:

- a. A journal of ideas developed in the week that they may use for their creative projects.
- b. Presentation and listening skills.
- c. New creative goals for themselves, their projects and the way they work.
- d. Foundations for great screen characters whom they may develop for their projects.
- e. A range of thoughts about concepts that worked for them and those that didn't.
- f. Knowing where their Comfort Zones are but also the New Areas that they are excited about pushing into and exploring: e.g. a student might identify during the course that he or she feels comfortable with comedy because s/he understands this genre well but may decide that s/he wants to explore the horror genre in future because s/he is excited about the creative challenges.

5-Day Workshop outline

Day 1. Inspiration day

(using photography / drawing / sound / video, etc) /

where to get ideas from / considering how maybe changing how you work, can change what your work is like.

Day 2. Face your fears day

How do you work? What works for you?

Sharing skills. Looking at Comfort zones that a student might be in. What are the pros and cons? What is writer's block and how may you break out of it?

Day 3. How theory can be your friend?

Focus on the particular demands of 'dramatic' writing – audience engagement and the 3 act structure – and how this may sit comfortably with creative/original screenwriting?

Day 4. Mystery day

A day of delight, challenge and collaboration! This may involve a trip to a nearby 'inspiring place'. The aim is to get the creative juices flowing and to start them off on a mini project which will come together on the last day.

Day 5. Collaboration day

Working with other people, students get to pursue further the ideas that were generated on Day 4's work and present a piece of dramatic writing, prose, poetry, video installation, montage, or narrative film that the trip inspired. The focus will be on trying to get the students to expand their boundaries and try out new approaches to their work.

* Each day will stand alone but also build into the climax of the week.

* As much as possible, mornings will be given over to talks, presentations, small writing exercises. The afternoon session will be given over to large exercises and sharing/feeding back.

* There may be small bits of homework but these will be fun, light and, generally, optional. We are delighted at what is emerging from our students who have followed this process, and I hope on a future occasion to be able to share with you some news of even more achievements from this focus on creativity.

What is most important to me now is that we create the climate and conditions for the possibility of serendipity. That is what matters, not what students call hard work! Play is not hard work!



THE FILM SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Lauri Törhönen

I think the first mistake is to try to think that that the school is the same as the outside world, because it is not. We should realize that the school is not the end of the students' journey, but rather it is the beginning of life for the students. It is practicing to get into the field, and I don't think that any producer student will be producing his feature film immediately after graduating from school. But if he does that, good luck to him.

In the first exercise the script writers are writing the script based on their own ideas, then we give it to the producers, and then we give it to the directors. The next exercise is for directors. The directors choose their producers and their writers and the script is based on the director's idea. Finally, they have to choose a script and work together.

János Xantus

Let me warn you all about one thing. In the entrance exams, we had a boy who wanted to become a film director, and to us he seemed to be a producer type.

At that time, we had the tests in three parts and between the last two parts I told to him that he had a choice. I could put him in the producer tests for the last phase, and if he was as good as I thought, he could get into the school, but if he failed he wouldn't. But the choice is not to go on in directing. It stops here, if you don't take producing. So he took the choice, was admitted as a producing student, and of course he tried to become a director, because it was his original idea. He never succeeded, but it was a constant problem for the whole school.

Zuzana Gindl-Tatárová

In my view, this idea that the film school environment is really different from the real one existing in the film industry of any country isn't always accurate.

I have to admit, that the environment in our school is a bit more similar to the outside world, because there is sometimes not enough money to run the school and to give students enough support to do their basic exercises, so the producers (and of course directors and script writers) who want to do their films need to go outside and apply for some grants. They really need to deal very early with the circumstances that they will face afterwards.

So, if a producer is able to get money and put it into the project, then he is the only person responsible for this money, whether he is creative enough or not. But if he has taken money from the school, then we can insist that he make it with those directors or those script writers, who are assigned to you. Because we have a group of students consisting of script writers, directors, cameramen, produc-

ers, sound technicians, and editor, these people produce two exercises a month. It is a huge amount of work but some of the short exercises are so well done that we can even send them to festivals.

Johann Clason

You asked what you are doing the next step. I think you formulated one of the answers because it is not only a semantic problem when you say creative producer.

In my experience it is a huge problem to define very precisely what the job of these people in the triangle is. It is not only the semantic problem but also this kind of attempt to say I am creative, so I am allowed to go into the work of the director, I am allowed to go into the work of the script writer.

My experience is if you allow, because he is a creative producer, to say I have to talk about the script, I have to talk about your approach to the style, I have to talk about this location, it does not fit in. What is the precise definition of the creative producer? It is not his job to act in this way.

Lauri Törhönen

When I started in the film school, there was no manual for a film school director. I did not know anybody. The last thing my last predecessor did was to go to CILECT congress in Mexico. He blocked CILECT for me for two years, just when I came. So I was wondering what to do. The only thing I could make up was to try to organize the film school as a film production company from everything, from the budget forms from the Finnish Film Foundation when you apply for money for your own film, so we are using all the stuff as if we were in that. I both agree and disagree with Johann Clason about it being a different thing. It is of course different because there is no private money and it is an umbrella for students anyway, but my philosophy, and it is only for the time I am there, the next one can do whatever, is to try and organize it so that the students during their study learn to understand not only what their own profession is but also where the borderline between my profession and the other ones is and what the others do, so that they have as much as possible of this experience when they leave school. And it has made easier most of the things like co-productions with TV companies, because the second year students have the same language, there is everybody in profession. That was the only thing I could think about.



THE POSITION OF THE CINEMATOGRAPHER IN THE CREW

If you think of Vilmos Zsigmond, László Kovács, Jean Badal, Elemér Ragay, Lajos Koltai who is the cinematographer of István Szabó and Giuseppe Tornatore or a few dozens of others who work successfully in England, Australia, in the United States, the first thing all of them have in common is that they had the same professor (strangely enough because these are very different generations). His name is György Illés, called in Budapest Pappi or Daddy, and he is going to have his 90th birthday in November. But if you ask the cinematographers about the secret of Pappi, they mostly say banalities, like Pappi did not want to clone himself, he did not want to make other Gyuribácsis. It sounds banal but maybe in practice it is not so simple.

All those DOPs had another professor in common.

She was a lady called Szolosiné, also an everlasting person, someone who was already old when I was young, an evergreen professor. She is not teaching any more but she might also be something like ninety, the teacher of art history for generations.

I did not like her when I was a student because for her art history stopped with the Impressionists. And when I was young, art history started there. I did not like her approach. But that's true that if you ask a DOP, for all of them she was a kind of goddess. She was very serious. When you had to take an exam, you had questions about a certain painting and you had to say where it was, describing it in detail: it is in the Prado, 2nd floor on the left, 3rd room near the fire exit. She was really serious. Somehow she managed to charm cinematographers. When they were travelling they would return with a box of slides, and they would come to school and show Szolosiné where they were and showed her the photographs. They had to see every art work everywhere they went. And it is true that Hungarian cinematographers know and respect fine arts.

I think that if there is a secret, the secret is the position of the cinematographer in the working process, in the crew. I think film education mirrors film industry.

I can't tell you why but in the post-war Hungarian film industry the cinematographer was the second most important person in shooting. We can try to think about why it happened, but I think it was part of a film industry which became important a little later, this was the so-called art cinema or film d'auteur in which mostly directors were writing their own scripts and there was no professional script writer involved.

The approach of those directors right after the war was that they had visions but their scripts were not dramatic pieces of literature, but somehow they tried to make sketchy notes of their visions. They were impatient to share their visions with someone and this person was the

cinematographer. Even before the producer was involved, these two people had already been together sharing a common project.

We can find reasons for this structure of the post-war film industry. This was a kind of studio structure and I think it was a copy of how the Soviet film industry was structured. There were four or five studios and the money from the government was divided into four or five portions. The studios were working in the frame of MAFILM, the Hungarian film factory, and what could be important from the cinematographer's point of view is that the cinematographer and also the director were employees of MAFILM, the Hungarian Film Factory.

Cinematographers also had a monthly salary even if they did not work. If they worked, they were paid for the film, not weekly, and if a cinematographer was involved in making a film, he spent half a year or more and participated in the pre-production and even in post-production. And this might also be important and have an effect on the situation in which the cinematographer has a position equal to the director, even his partner, before the producer and after the script writer.

I asked my colleagues about their practice and what they would think to be important to share with you. It is not evident because lots of people would not tell you relevant things not because they don't want to share their secrets but because they simply don't know about their own methods. So if you ask them they would say creative things.

To give a concrete example, János Kende is now the Head of the Department at our school and he was always the cinematographer of Miklós Jancsó. He spoke about whether we should teach directors and cinematographers together. Naturally, they are often together for the first two years and prepare their exam films together. But it is interesting to hear what János says that he does not like, for instance going into technical details when the teaches directing students because they could easily get bored with all those technical details. And that could have a counter effect. I remember when I was a student I had the same problems. After two and a half hours in the studio doing lighting tasks, I was fed up with all that stuff. And he is careful not to go too much into technical details about cinematography with directors.

János Xantus, SFE, Budapest

I will tell you in a few words a brief curriculum of what János Kende is doing. The Hungarian education of cinematography is based on lighting tasks, this is the basis, the most important thing. They spend a lot of time in the studio. So he starts in the first semester with lighting tasks to be photographed. This is still life and portrait.

The next step is to shoot on colour 16 mm, a lighting task in the studio and then on 35 mm, where the students will be surprised to see nuances and details, which were not seen on the 16 mm. So this is the next step to shoot on 35mm.

Just to return to the problem Renen stated, the problem that the students come with electronics and they have this special way of seeing things on TV. I think it is important that János lets his students only the first time they are in a TV studio with three or four cameras to do their first television lighting, DOP and camera work. This is after they have shot their lighting task on 35 mm, so by the time they start to work on electronics they have this very particular sensibility towards the details of film negative. I think it is important or interesting.

What János also does is ask his students to shoot commercials for a whole semester under the guidance of professionals working in another field.

Then in the fourth year the students work under the guidance of guest professors or cinematographers and they do whatever they want with the students for a year. I think it is also important and interesting.

There is a return to the idea of the time when we talked to professors, the idea of freedom. It was back in the old times when Pappi started this, he was the father of the Film Faculty as I said, his slogan was about freedom, that you have to leave the students alone with their problems. The bigger talent the student has the bigger freedom you give him. If you really see that he does not find the best solutions easily, then you should spend a bit more time with him.

But just as János does in the studio for the lighting tasks, first he asks the students for the description of the project. How the student wants to make his construction, may be together with a sketch. Then they discuss the project and then he may criticise it but he lets the student do what he wants. And then the student builds the construction and everyone can see that it does not really work, or it is

not good at all. Then János would show him two or three other routine solutions for this situation. So they make another construction and then another one and the third one. And then he deletes his last construction and lets the students rebuild it again, something else or the same thing.

So this is the question of freedom. When the students prepare their exam films János is there but does not force himself into the crew.

This is also the question of giving frames, but respecting freedom. This might be a useful technical advice. It often happens that the student makes his lighting construction and it is bad and then the student would say that it is exactly what I wanted. I want to make it bad. What Miklós Bíró does is to choose a painting from the 16th – 19th century period, a Flemish painting or a Caravaggio or whatever, and there is a kind of lighting construction visible. And then not to copy it but to take a counter shot, the construction of light you see on the painting, to take the counter shot of this shot and to light it. And then you have something to talk about. Then he can hardly say I wanted to do something very bad.

Are your DOP students co-operating with designers?

Unfortunately, we don't educate art directors and designers. This is done at the University of Applied Arts. And we don't really collaborate with them. I don't know how they are doing without us and I don't know how we are doing without them but it is like that. In fact, at the moment we have a young lady who does set design for the exam films. She is absolutely enthusiastic. I think she is not paid at all. But she does fantastic things. That is how we are working. Of course if you are shooting a film in the studio you have to collaborate with the set designer if there is one.

Why am I asking? There was a lot of talk about the triangle yesterday. Which was director, DOP and designer.

I think there are also several triangles for the cinema but most of our school productions are quite poor; if you shoot in exterior, for this kind of film you don't always have money or the possibility to work with a set designer. And you have to do it on your own.

Lauri Törhönen

We are a faculty at the university where set design has been taught for 30 years, mainly for theatre. Now that we moved under the same roof with the rest of the university, we started a special discipline for film and television and virtual design, which is one of our disciplines instead of being one of set design disciplines, but even before we used their students to design. Actually, half of our students used students of architecture as set designers for their films until I came to school. I thought it was crazy that there is the same department at our university and we don't use it.

That is a good question. Why do you not collaborate with them?

János Xantus

In fact our students, directors, cinematographers, producers and even script writers are taught set design. But they are not meant to be set designers. There is a set design professor who teaches our students but they are not going to be set designers. That is a different faculty. But we will collaborate.

PICTURE PROSODY

In 1973 I came to the Romanian Film School as a student, and my teacher wore a black suit, a white shirt and a tie. He told us that in this profession you cannot teach, you can only steal. Should I become a thief or a cinematographer? I asked him then, and after I asked him why is this. He told me that it is because there are no words with which to teach this profession.

I've been working as a cinematographer for twenty years. Should I direct my students to learn by doing? That way they might do better outside. For me, theory is an instrument and a way. It's a way to transmit knowledge verbally or in writing, and an instrument to construct a body of things that are intended to inform the work of the cinematographer.

After working for so long in the field, your experience and skills coagulate into a dense core. You respond automatically to different situations. This is quite hard to put in words. I had to find a way to break this core into smaller parts that I could offer to my students. I felt that I needed an instrument which would be enough powerful to break this core, but at the same time not to pulverize everything into a dust that cannot be reassembled. I found that semiotics is a process, but it was important to go beyond assigning books on semiotics to the students. I tried to find all the useful mechanisms in semiotic thought, and when I succeeded, I had a tool with which to proceed.

I have a theoretical approach for my cinematographers: technical theory, picture theory, and contextual theory. Technical theory includes camera techniques, theory of mechanics, electronics, optics, sensitometry, video technique, the digital domain and the influence of the digital domain on our profession. Here, technical theory has the role of familiarizing the cinematographer with the tools of the profession.

Picture theory deals with the semiotics of cinematic story telling, in rhetoric and in something in something I will call "image prosody." In picture semiotics we have the basics: semantics, syntactics, codes, etc. We deal with the basic grammar of the image, and its morphology and syntax. We go deeper and examine elementary story telling techniques, continuity, parallelism, etc. Then we consider the rhetoric of the picture, which is the act of communication that transmits affective messages to the spectator. Here we examine issues such as the quality of light, pictorial versus graphic approaches, camera movements, style, and then we discuss the possibility of the image to persuade people to do things. The next part of our theoretical journey is picture prosody. That means taking some basic principles of music and translating them into pictures, and allowing the picture to influence the spectator in extremely

subtle ways.

Finally, we deal with contextual theories that site film in a different context, such as film history, aesthetics, etc. We have two major exercises. In the second term the students shoot a poetic film. They have to convey an emotion feeling. In the fifth term they train using the 35 mm. Later they have to shoot a commercial. In the sixth term they have to shoot a videotape. We are quite open to the students who have their own projects, which they can work on in their free time. We accept six students per generation. They work together exchanging roles.



AN EXERCISE IN COOPERATION BETWEEN STUDENTS OF EIGHT DISCIPLINES NFTA, Amsterdam

One

-day fiction practice (4 to 5 minute film)

An example of an important exercise in cooperation

between students of eight disciplines (screenwriting, directing, producing, production design, camera, sound, VFX, editing), carried out in the second year. It is the first exercise in which all students are present on a set in their own discipline. The focus is the cooperation between the students. A coach, a professional from the student's field of study, supports each student.

Student production designers and student screenwriters initiate this project. Together they determine the physical environment, the arena. Assuming that it can be constructed in our studios, they choose for example a Victorian Manor, a factory or a cruiser. The student production designers have to design two sets, an interior and an exterior. Each student screenwriter writes a story for the interior and for the exterior.

Research is carried out together by production design and screenwriting students. Sketches are made and each production design student makes a model. They put the different designs together to create a final design. This is used to make a construction drawing (in Vector Works) and a final model.

From this moment on, the visual effects students are involved. They make a three-dimensional model, using Maya software. With this model not only the production design students, but also the students from the other disciplines can get to work.

Triangles and crews are formed (teachers decide who with whom). Scripts are being discussed; decoupages, sound designs and budgets are being made; pre-production starts.

Students of all disciplines help with the construction work in the studios under the guidance of the production design students.

Finally, about thirteen films are shot during a two-week period, each production with one day of rehearsals and one shooting day. At the end of each day an evaluation of the shooting process is held. When all films have been edited and the sound mixes are completed, a general viewing and final evaluations take place.



APPENDIX

INITIATION AND CONTENT EDITING: RENEN SCHORR,
DIRECTOR - FOUNDER, JSFS
HOST: ZUZANA GINDL- TATÁROVÁ
VICE DEAN FOREIGN AFFAIRS, VŠMU

GEECT
European Grouping of Film Schools



SCHOOL'S BEST KEPT SECRETS

Film & Television Faculty VŠMU

30. 9. - 3. 10. 2004



Entertainment
Imaging



MEDIA



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centrum
súčasného
umenia

NOVART

COOP
JEDNOTA
SLOVENSKO

Bratislava

LIST OF SPEAKERS
(in alphabetical order)

ALAN BERNSTEIN, HEAD OF STUDIES, LFS, UK

ANGEL BLASCO, DIRECTOR, EAV MADRID, SPAIN

MICHAL BREGANT, DEAN, FAMU PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC

MARTIN CIEL, CINEMA STUDIES DPT., VŠMU BRATISLAVA, SLOVAKIA

ROGER CRITTENDEN, DIRECTOR, FULL-TIME PROGRAMME, NFTS BEACONSFIELD, UK

ZUZANA GINDL-TATÁROVÁ, VICE DEAN FOREIGN AFFAIRS, VŠMU BRATISLAVA, SLOVAKIA

MICHEL DE GRAAF, HEAD OF PRODUCTION DESIGN DEPARTMENT, AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

ANDREAS GRUBER, VICE-DEAN, HFF MUNICH, GERMANY

ALBY JAMES, HEAD OF SCREENWRITING & EXTERNAL RELATIONS, THE LEEDS SCHOOL OF ARTS, ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN, UK

PAVEL JECH, HEAD OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, FAMU PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC

HENK MULLER, HEAD OF PRODUCING, NFTA AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

MARC NICOLAS, DIRECTOR, LA FÉMIS PARIS, FRANCE

TOMAS PETRAN, VICE-DEAN, FAMU PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC

RENEN SCHORR, DIRECTOR- FOUNDER, JSFS, JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

LAURI TÖRHÖNEN, PRESIDENT OF GEECT, HEAD OF FILM AND TELEVISION, UIAH HELSINKI, FINLAND

BRENDAN WARD, VISITING PROFESSOR, FAMU PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC

JÁNOS XANTUS, HEAD OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, SZINHAZ- ES FILMMŰVÉSZETI EGYETEM, BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS
(in alphabetical order)

- ALAN BERNSTEIN, LONDON FILM SCHOOL, UK
- ANGEL BLASCO, EAV MADRID, SPAIN
- MICHAL BREGANT, FAMU, PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC
- MARTIN CIEL, VSMU BRATISLAVA, SLOVAKIA
- JOHAN CLASON, LILLEHAMMER, NORWAY
- ROGER CRITTENDEN, NFTS, BEACONSFIELD, UK
- NATHALIE DEGIMBE, IAD BRUSSELS, BELGIUM
- ZUZANA GINDL-TATÁROVÁ, VSMU BRATISLAVA, SLOVAKIA
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- RENEN SCHORR, JSFS, JERUSALEM, ISRAEL
- JYRI SILLART, TALLINN PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY, ESTONIA
- HARALD STJERNE, DRAMATISKA INSTITUTET, STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN
- HILLARY THOMAS, NFTS BEACONSFIELD, UK
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- BRENDAN WARD, FAMU, PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC
- JÁNOS XANTUS, SFE, BUDAPEST, HUNGARY
- ANKE ZWIRNER, HFF POTSDAM-BABELSBERG, GERMANY

Programme

Friday, 1st October

Welcome Note – Zuzana Gindl-Tatárová

Kodak Presentation- Guy Manas, France

1. Student Selection – Creative Producer Programme

- * Selecting the Creative Producer: Henk Muller, Amsterdam
- * Selecting the Creative Producer, Janos Xantus, Budapest
- * The Bible Quiz: Renen Schorr, Jerusalem

2. Week One

- * Week one : Andreas Gruber, München
- * Documentary Students Camp: Janos Xantus, Budapest
- * New Faces in the Corridor : Renen Schorr, Jerusalem

3. The First Exercise

- * Marc Nicolas, Paris
- * Henk Muller and Michel de Graaf, Amsterdam

4. Visual Language

- * Confronting the Twin Challenges of Ignorance and the Seduction of Technique, Roger Crittenden, Beaconsfield
- * Teaching Genre Means Teaching the Theory: Martin Ciel, Bratislava

5. Auteur Versus Producer

- * The TRIANGLE Process: Lauri Törhönen, Helsinki,
- * Entering the Director´s Mind: Alan Bernstein, London
- * “Lock them Up”: The Pick of the Triangle Process: Henk Muller and Michel de Graaf, Amsterdam
- * The Rashomon: Renen Schorr, Jerusalem

EXHIBITION OPENING IN THE FOYER OF VSMU + WINE

DINNER AT A-klub, Panska Str. - pick up from the hotel IBIS at 20.00 – 10 minutes walk to the Down Town

Saturday, 2nd October

6. Building the Muscles of Imagination

- * The Second of the Four Angles of the Triangle: János Xantus, Budapest
- * Andreas Gruber, München
- * Visual Language for Screenwriters: Alby James, Leeds

7. Producers Curriculum

- * The Producers Diploma Film: Marc Nicolas, Paris
- * School´s Hyde Park: Zuzana Gindl-Tatarova, Bratislava

8. Breaking the Mould

- * Cinema Dance: Pavel Jech, Brendan Ward, Tomas Petran, Prague
- * Collision: Pavel Jech, Prague
- * Dramaturgy on Location: Zuzana Gindl-Tatarova, Bratislava

9. Audience Awareness

- * Cinema Paradiso: Caterina D´Amico, Rome (presented by Renen Schorr)
- * Make the Comic Relief: Renen Schorr, Jerusalem
- * Curriculum for Distributors & Exhibitors: Marc Nicolas, Paris
- * Craft and Creativity are Linked to Marketability: Alby James, Leeds

10. The Morning After

- * Michal Bregant, Prague
- * Angel Blasco, Madrid

Vladimir Stric, **MEDIA DESK Slovakia presentation**

Discussion: training of young professionals,-fresh graduates.

FAREWELL DINNER – Goose Feast in Grob near Bratislava

Pick up at 19:30 by bus from the hotel IBIS

Bratislava

The End
