

“The European tradition of the author and its influence on script development strategy.”

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As an introduction I would like to tell you that the choice of the topic is not mine. I'm not really sure that I understood the sentence I am supposed to analyse. But I am here to talk about *“The European tradition of the author and its influence on script development strategy.”* So I will do by best to give my contribution and I will also try to play Asterix if that is what I'm supposed to do.

In order to make you understand my angle first I'd like to say a few words about me, about what I've done before. I'm French, obviously, I'm based in Paris, I'm a retired producer, I stopped producing twelve years ago, after a film I'm still very proud of, which was not French: *Léolo* by Jean-Claude Lauzon, a French-Canadian film. I only co-produced this film but still I'm proud of it. Eleven years ago, I created my company in order to do research and development for producers, directors, script writers and other people from the industry. Something I'd never had time for when I was producing. When I did that, everybody in France thought that I was completely crazy, and still I think that there are a lot of people in my country who don't understand what I'm doing. But I'm still here, after twelve years now, so maybe it has a sense. I'm also not financed by all the systems of subsidies we've got in my country because I don't consider myself as a public service. I'm not. Unfortunately, most of my clients think that I am a public service and it's not easy to deal with that.

Training professionals represents thirty percent of my time, mostly in Southern Europe and in the Arab world as well, and recently in Black Africa. The training is mostly aimed at producers, but also at scriptwriters. I think I'm not really teaching scriptwriters. I'm designing the training elements and most of the time I'm something like a tutor. I'm not so used to this work as a tutor or whatever it is. In everyday life I try to help people make the dream of their film come true, but I also try to kill the nightmare before it comes true. That is to say, I try to stop the process of development when the film that could come from it is a monster. So I'm involved in the process of writing but mostly in the process of

development, which in my country is not very well understood. Everybody thinks that if you write, you develop, which is not true.

Back to our topic, the sentence : “*The European tradition of the author and its influence on script development strategy.*” I would like to analyse this sentence. Is there any European tradition of authors? From the European point of view, no, there isn't. But we can think of the French tradition of the author, especially if we consider the rest of this sentence. Why the French tradition instead of the European? I don't think it's because I'm French that I see a difference. French just because the French author tradition started with the *Nouvelle Vague* which did a very good job of marketing this notion, and this marketing still exists. Let's be fair: *Les cahiers du Cinéma* didn't invent the notion of *auteur*. The American critic Frank Wood, before World War 1, and the Italian poet Ricciotto Canudo and even the writer and critic **Delluc**, promoted the *auteur*-idea before the *Cahiers*. The idea that a film depends essentially on its director, and because of that film can reach the status of work of art. So maybe we can talk about the European tradition of author as French. With the globalisation of the modern world, the European tradition of the author, if we admit that it exists, has to find a way to resist Hollywood, to fight for audience. If Europe accepts that cinema is an industry, it is still considered as an industry of art, an industry of culture and individual expression which deals with aesthetic, linguistic, narrative elements. Elements that reflect the personality of an author, and when we talk about authors in this case, we talk about directors: author-directors. Just for that I'm going to say that we need, probably, to consider Europe but exclude the U.K. They don't have the same attitude as we do in the rest of Europe and I think that's good. It's not a criticism.

So let's talk about the authors tradition in Europe, more than the European tradition of author, as it definitely has an influence on script development, but I do not like to consider the word strategy yet. So, what kind of influence could it have? An artistic one, for sure; a human one, I mean in terms of mentality; a technical one; a legal one; an economic one and maybe some others. Let's consider only the bad effects, for the moment, of the author tradition. When you consider that you are dealing with art and not entertainment, you are, most of

the time (especially if you are French) more pretentious, less open to other people's contribution. These other people could be producers, but also script writers, actors or any other technicians. You are more individual and you just forget that cinema is a collective work. You don't even want to see the evolution of the market and the weight of the audience. In that case you are not very open to any strategy. The question is how many artists do we really have in France? In Europe? Compared to the number of directors who are still making movies it's easy to say that we are dealing with art, but how many artists do we have? Very little, so it's important to share knowledge and to work together and not to consider that if you make a movie you are definitely, obviously, an author, an artist. It's afterwards that you know if you are one or not.

Some author-director-artists consider that nobody can share their vision and that only their own subject can be the right material for the film. Of course it can be true but we have a lot of other good examples where the material was not the material of the directors and at the end it was a piece of art. But in France, we have a caricatural situation, even now that we know the numbers. If you consider that we make 200 feature films a year, only five percent (it's very difficult to have the number for France, but let's say less than five percent) are not written by the directors at all. Forty-five percent are co-written by directors and scriptwriters together and the other fifty percent is written only by directors. What is weird is that sometimes this is not because the directors want to be alone in this process, but because the tools the producer has in order to wed the talents are so low that they let the director write alone. It's also caused by a lack of money but this is most of the time a good excuse not to change a situation. If we go back ten years, the percentage of movies, which were written only by directors was seventy percent. It's incredible. Scriptwriters only had the possibility to write for T.V. or to become directors, which is very tricky. The producer has great difficulties to build a strategy because of this and it is very dangerous for scriptwriters to write their own script without a director attached. It is also difficult for the producer to develop a project from a book or from an original screenplay a project without a director attached. Most of the time it's suicide. Producers have to be very careful when they hire or fire scriptwriters in terms of contract. It's not so easy to deal with the law and with the mentality. Of

course, we can always find a way with contracts but with mentalities it is much trickier and much more difficult. In this context it's almost impossible to build a strategy. That's why I was so afraid of this sentence I had to talk about.

That's why, unfortunately, I cannot talk about a *script development strategy in Europe* as long as the misunderstanding about what or who an author is will continue. It will be difficult. This is a pity because there is a real stake for European cinema and cinema in general. We have to find our way through the narrow-minded way of considering the author system as a commercial product system. It's not art against money. it's a forced debate. The goal is not to be an unknown and cursed artist who resists the system. The goal is to be a commercial artist. If you have talent for it of course, otherwise you are not an artist at all. A few years ago, Eric Rohmer wrote *Je suis un réalisateur commercial* [I am a commercial director]. This sounds funny, but in fact it's true because he means that when all his movies recoup their money that is the reason that he can go on making movies. Even if it's a very low budget film and for a very small audience he can still consider himself a commercial author. This was like a bomb because nobody wanted to imagine that Eric Rohmer is commercial, and I don't know why because it's not forbidden to find a public, it's what we have to do anyway. So, as professionals, we have to consider the niche. We should not think that those niches are the only possibilities we have to stay alive, but consider them as a part of our strategy.

Let's question the word *strategy*. One of the bigger problems in Europe is the lack of strategy, not only in script development, unfortunately, but mostly in distribution. Marketing is a key word for finding the right audience everywhere. In order to build a strategy you need to understand why you should have one; it sounds weird but most of the time people don't understand why they should have a strategy. More than ever we have to consider globalization and the evolution of the audience. We also have to believe in our future. That is to say, invest and take risks in research and development. We've been very lucky children in some countries like mine; we had a lot of subsidies, a lot of public money and at the end of the day it killed the notion of risk. And we have to go back to this notion which is very important: to invest and take risks in research

and development, considering development as a vital stage in the life of a project and in the life of a company, or career if we talk about talent. We also have to share solidarity between producers, directors, scriptwriters, actors, technicians, agents, whatever. The battle will be more difficult to win, if not impossible, if we are not together. We also have to increase our networking; it is the only way to help the circulation of talent and knowledge and to carry out a production in the correct manner

To go back to training programmes, because we are talking about training programmes, I think that it is exactly what we can share when we are trained together as Europeans. For me for example, I discovered that I was European when I was in those programmes talking with other Europeans about European cinema. Before I didn't know about European, let's say, identity, even if I myself am a kind of mixture of European. We also have to share and build the European attitude, we have to create it since we see that there is no real tradition. We also have to provide prototypes, for the international industry; to get rid of our complex of inferiority or superiority regarding Hollywood. We have to consider the market as a niche, but also as a big one, as a big market far away from the French *auteuriste*. attitude I can't translate because it's so French. The attitude that thinks that existing aside is noble and that kills the industry but also the art by ignoring the market on purpose. Playing mostly with public money to do movies for one's family and, even worse, only for themselves. The young generation not only wants to find its own way to the public but to stay in Europe, as the US is no longer considered the only *El Dorado* for talent, which is completely new. I believe in the raising of a European attitude which can hopefully become a European tradition able to lead us to a script development strategy where script writers, directors, producers, not only from Europe, can find their way to resist standardization. So that somebody in a few years will be able to do a lecture here in Valencia about the European tradition of author and its influence on script development, which was impossible for me right now, unfortunately. Thank you.