



I am convinced that if you start by saying, "I'm going to destroy everything, I'm going to be modern", then you won't be modern. You can be modern, and must want to be so, because you must contribute something, but you can be modern only by humbly following your predecessors."

- Jean Renoir

THE BELGRADE MANIFESTO 2007

There is a crisis in cinema today, a deep malaise, a feeling of artistic exhaustion, of pointlessness. The evolution of cinematic language that is so vital to the continued well-being and relevance of the medium has pretty much come to a standstill. Good films are getting fewer, the informed and knowledgeable audience that is so important for their success has shrunk. The older generation don't go to the cinema any more because so many films are for young people, and the young people today have little idea of cinema's capacity for depth, excitement and complexity. The critics, who should be guiding and educating that audience, are mostly inadequate, and the distribution structures no longer work.

The growth of the globalised market and of Hollywood's extraordinary success in exploiting it, despite the fact that the films are getting worse, has not only depleted the alternative markets but, more disturbingly, has undermined alternative approaches to production by acting as a virus - its methods and philosophy are either taken on directly or internalised. Nobody pays attention to form, without which, as our predecessors understood, nothing worthwhile can possibly develop. The 'story' is given exaggerated importance; the study of its crude mechanics has become an industry in itself with consultants and experts in every financing agency and production house, part of an ever growing and unproductive bureaucracy whose purpose is to sniff out the trends and fads of the day and to select and develop (and distort) productions in accordance with those predictions.

But it isn't working. With very few exceptions - the elusive 'crossover' or the brief success of an undemanding formula in a national market - these films are not making money. The system is unsustainable and what makes it worse is that we know that those films which we revere, which have passed the test of time, could never be made today. However, the landscape has shifted and we are now entering the era of 'digital cinema'. There are an ever increasing number of conferences and conventions about the impact of this on financing, distribution and exhibition. What is being ignored is the mirror image of this crisis, and one which is inextricably linked to it, and that is the long-term stagnation of cinematic language and form and the consequent lack of innovation and depth which are essential to keep cinema alive.

We are at a crossroads where the new possibilities opened up by digital production and exhibition have real potential for the rejuvenation of cinema. But the danger is they could also work against it by swamping the market with low-quality work. As filmmakers, we have to grasp this opportunity. At last, it is now possible, because of the huge reduction in costs, to bypass existing funding channels and make high quality films **WITHOUT PERMISSION.**

In addition, we need to adapt and develop those models of distribution and exhibition that are already being pioneered and begin to identify new sources of minimal funding. It is time to take responsibility for our own future and establish a committed, interactive community that can share ideas and work together to find viable ways to make and show our films and build audiences that will want to see them.

List of Signatories (as of 7.12.07)

Jon Sanders, filmmaker / Nora Hoppe, filmmaker / Tariq Marzbaan, filmmaker / Vojislav Vucinic, festival director / Srdjan Vucinic, film essayist / Alexander Sokurov, filmmaker / Sergey Moshkov, sound designer / Alexandra Tuchinskaya, film essayist / Boris Kovac, composer, musician / Mikiko Tomita, film programmer / Nicos Ligouris, filmmaker / Claus Wilbrandt, scriptwriter / Boro Draskovic, filmmaker / Eva Stefani, filmmaker, professor / Rimvydas Leipus, cinematographer / Neringa Kazukauskaitė, film essayist, critic / Aki Kaurismäki, filmmaker / Jack Hazan, filmmaker / Maysoon Pachachi, filmmaker / Mike Hakata, filmmaker / Galina Antoshewskaja, production coordinator / Joe Comerford, filmmaker / Rod Stoneman, critical writer, filmmaker / Gareth Evans, writer, editor / James Leahy, writer / Jill Daniels, filmmaker / John Akomfrah, filmmaker.

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