Europe is an extraordinary place to live in at the moment. For all kinds of reasons, not least for the strength of its collective cultural values. And even more because of the power and diversity of its vibrant cinema industry.

But never before in the history of European cinema have we been at such a pivotal turning point – where the white heat of technology, the shifting sands of geopolitics, and the multiplicity of delivery systems for our ever-evolving and diverse stories have brought us to a crossroads. A crossroads where the decisions we make about the future will be essential for the further growth and development of not just the industrial process, but also the narrative process of where we want to see European cinema go in the next decades.

As we stand at not just this fork in the road – these forks in the road, the European Film Academy and its membership need to initiate a serious discussion about the future of our cinema if we want to contribute to its long-term development and growth. Most importantly we need to keep it relevant and to keep it attractive to the next generations of filmmakers.

Alongside that, it needs to have at its core, and as a mission, to promote and position narrative formats and delivery platforms that influence and can have a potential with the ever-growing audiences of the years to come. Our very future depends on that.

The Future Lasts a Long Time, the title of Louis Althusser's seminal memoir, should also be the mantra for the European Film Academy after more than three decades of existence, as it enters the next phase of its growth, development and positioning for the next 30 years.

That's why in this issue of Close-up, we examine some of the bigger issues facing us in the next decades, at the heart of which are the crucial ideas surrounding the importance of sustainability at all levels which European cinema must handle if it is to have any future at all. (This subject in itself will likely be the subject of an entire issue of Close-up in future.)

On top of that, we are looking at such a broad roster of ideas including where storytelling can go in the future, talking with rising producers about the challenges and opportunities ahead; and the possibilities and new directions in sales, distribution and exploitation of intellectual property.

What do we as the Academy need to do to adapt to the future?
There are so many questions to think about:

- Is there a future for the kind of films we are making?
- Should a film academy only promote films with a theatrical release or a film festival run?
- What do we actually mean when we talk about “European cinema”?
- How do we deal with shrinking cinema audiences, and the fact that younger generations prefer other formats and other ways of consuming films?
- Are the downward trends in cinema attendance reversible?
- What are the real implications of the digital single market and the issue of territoriality, and is it crucial to the current European distribution model?
- Does media chronology need modernising?
- Are we doing enough for diversity and gender equality, and attracting diverse audiences?
- Can we keep up with the rest of the world in technical innovation?

Our creative, cultural and cinematic agenda needs to be able to inspire and mobilise a growing world that is not only global, but also digital.

It has long been held at the core of the European Union that cultural investment and policy (of which cinema and audio-visual are a key part) can be considered as transformative – in a world in which Europe plays a growing and important role as a global hub for ideas, talent, storytelling and investment.

And this all needs to be significantly underpinned by the Academy’s unshakeable belief in freedom of expression, mutual understanding, cultural diversity – and finally an essentially humanist vision of Europe.

Mike Downey is Deputy Chairman of the European Film Academy.
Ruben Östlund screened his Palme d’Or and EFAs European Film 2017 winner THE SQUARE to many appreciative audiences around the globe. Yet it was screening the film in smaller towns in Sweden that gave him an idea to help cinema’s future.

“With THE SQUARE, we wanted to show our support to cinema owners not only in Göteborg and Stockholm and Malmö, but also in the countryside,” the writer/director explains. So the team did a tour of about 10 cities and brought along the Palme d’Or and European Film Award trophies to show audiences. “It was trying to create an event the cinema owners could be proud of, with us visiting their cinemas,” Östlund explains.

That mini-tour gave him the idea that one way to develop audiences for European cinema is to require filmmakers who get government funding for production to tour with those films afterwards, creating screenings that feel like events.

“One thing that we need to do in the industry is work to re-build an audience, by introducing going to the cinema for the next generation. They have to be able to get this experience,” Östlund says.

“What happens if all directors in Europe who are getting state funding, at the same time we get this money, we say we will attend events and tour our films in 10 different cities. Imagine if all European directors did this? In Sweden alone, that would be 400 events a year. Then we would have a cinema culture that is quite alive.”

To nurture the filmmakers of the future, film education in schools also will be essential. “In order to re-build cinema culture, moving images need to become a topic in school from grade one,” he says. “We now live in an image-based society not a text-based society and we should think about that with the education of the next generation. That’s how we’ll recruit really interesting talents to the cinema later.”

Of course, it’s also about the stories filmmakers are currently exploring and how they are telling them. “One of the most important things is that the content we make is about how we are looking at the world and thinking about society and what kind of society we want … It can’t be about [audience] numbers, if we are focusing on numbers we’re losing the reason we are being creative.”

He appreciates the power that the moving image has to impact people (and the filmmakers’ responsibility that comes along with that) – citing one example of how people were found to be driving over the speed limit when they left cinemas after watching THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS films.

“It’s a super important thing that we have an ongoing discussion. Are we expressing our own experience of life or are we just re-producing cinema that has come before?,” he adds.

That can be a problem for filmmakers trapped in Europe’s arthouse past, he says, and he’d rather see films “taking the best parts of American filmmaking and combining that with the best parts of European filmmaking … films can be wild and entertaining and still be dealing with important context.”

He continues, “In European cinema, we have to be proud of our past and our history, but we also have to let go of a certain kind of arthouse style.” He feels that some films now are just “imitating an arthouse genre.”

He would love to see more films like Lina Wertmüller and Luis Buñuel made, movies “in an intellectual tradition that were so entertaining.” He admires his contemporaries like Yorgos Lanthimos and Maren Ade for achieving those kinds of films today.
They are also the sort of films Östlund is directing, as well as producing via Plattform Produktion, the Goteborg and Stockholm-based company that he founded in 2002 with producer Erik Hemmendorff. The company has a busy production slate that also includes debut features like John Skoog’s poetic SEASON (SÄSONG), Mikel Cee Karlsson’s personal documentary FRAEMLING, and Ninja Thyberg’s LA-shot JESSICA.

“You get happy any time you see a younger director coming into filmmaking with energy,” he says of those rising talents.

For his own part in the future, Östlund wants to keep engaging the audience in new ways. “The audience is coming in for around two hours to sit together, so you have to create a show for them. To create a dynamic experience out of that show, to let the audience be drawn into it.”

“I’m much more curious of trying to be wilder today and doing things that are unexpected for the audience,” he adds.

That unexpected monkey living in the flat of Elisabeth Moss’s character in THE SQUARE was one example of that kind of wildness. “I didn’t want the audience to know exactly what’s going to happen in this movie,” he reveals.

Östlund is open to working with new technologies. For instance, he is “curious” about virtual reality and might even explore the idea to shoot one scene of his next feature in virtual reality, “That is a way of creating an even more rich experience … that audiences would watch in connection with the feature.”

The film, to be shot in the English language, will look at characters intersecting from the world of fashion and the billionaire jet set scene. Settings will include Milan fashion week, a luxury cruise ship, and finally a deserted island.

Östlund is interested in setting the film partly in the fashion world because of the unnatural emphasis on physical beauty. “Beauty becomes an economical value, models’ looks are their currency. Looks are one factor except being born with money or an education that can help you run in the upper classes of society. It’s a genetic lottery.”

The idea of value – physical beauty or great wealth - becomes skewed on the island. He explains, “There’s a Filipino cleaning lady, and she knows how to fish. Suddenly the billionaires are starting to talk like dedicated socialists, ‘it’s important we share equally.’ And the male model can use his looks with the cleaning lady.”

Östlund sounds excited about the new film and is clearly enjoying the casting process, which he calls “fun and playful.” He adds, “I like to do improvis with them, even with myself in one of the roles, and if they say something good I can put it in the script.”

Östlund and Hemmendorff are now scouting islands and ships (similar to the classic early 20th century windjammer Sea Cloud). “Every time when I make a new film I hope it will have many shooting days in a single location,” he says with a laugh. “But when I get any new idea, it turns out to be more and more complicated.”

There will be a lot of expectation to see how he follows up THE SQUARE, but Östlund is trying not to feel the pressure. He just wants to get the material right. “When I reach a certain point with the script, I can’t wait to start shooting these scenes, that’s when I start feeling confident.”

He adds, “Of course, you have ups and downs being a director. Some days you think, ‘Oh my God, this is going to be horrible,’ I only feel this 30% of the time (laughs). Then 50% of the time, I think, ‘This is going to be a masterpiece.’”

UK-based Wendy Mitchell is a contributing editor at Screen International and a consultant for San Sebastian International Film Festival, Zurich Film Festival, CPH:DOX, Randles Image’s CONNeXT, and Goteborg’s TV Drama Vision and Nordic Film Market.
Jeremy Thomas is filmmaker. He’s a multi-Oscar winning producer. He’s a media business owner sitting atop a bespoke independent film empire he built working tirelessly without a break for more than 50 years. And he’s a survivor.

Not just because he continues to mount ambitious, independent films around the globe in his 70th year, but also because Thomas is back behind his desk after illness side-lined him last year.

Back in his gloriously chaotic rooftop office, surrounded by awards trophies, photographs, scripts, books, ornaments and sundry other reminders of his impressive, glittering life in film, Thomas is fighting fit, “back to my regimen of swimming and cycling,” he says.

Formed by Thomas in 1974, Recorded Picture Company (RPC), continues to be one of the U.K.’s pre-eminent production companies. Its filmography stretches to more than 60 projects and includes work from visionary auteurs such as Bernardo Bertolucci, David Cronenberg, Nagisa Oshima and Nicolas Roeg. Thomas most recently produced Matteo Garrone’s DOGMAN, now nominated for four EFA’s (and already the winner of European Hair & Makeup Artist prize), chosen as Italy’s foreign-language Oscar contender and winner of Cannes’ Best Actor prize. His sales and financing company HanWay Films is a key presence at every film market and festival around the globe. Thomas’s name sits atop film scrolls as “Jeremy Thomas presents” on many of his films, a nod to his creative input (and desire to underline his shrewd understanding of proprietorship).

Next up Thomas and RPC are partners in Garrone’s live action version of PINOCCHIO to star Roberto Benigni. It will shoot in the first quarter of 2019 on location in Italy across Lazio, Tuscany and Puglia; HanWay is selling world-wide. He will also produce Takashi Miike’s next film in 2019.

Thomas talks to Stuart Kemp about the future for movie-making and cinema and why sticking to his taste and making films for adults will always be his future.

Do you think the future is going to be harder for someone like that?

No. But I think the future is very difficult for somebody like me who has existed in the past and has happened to come into the future. For those that came into the future, which is what I would call the post-digital age, everything changed.

So, does the digital age look promising?

Making a story either in a single or multiple parts or a continuing series encompasses all the same things, camera, the technique of telling a story using the tried and trusted of ways of doing it with inventiveness or tradition, either or. That’ll stay because there’s a huge appetite for new.

What is the future of consumption?

There are still lots of curated places to see the films but it is a very small footprint. And the cinema is a very antiquated way of showing films. But it’s the way that I love and always will be.
How has the traditional financing, production and sales business changed and where do you think it might end up in five years’ time?

I was always encouraged by everybody who works with me or questions the idea of Recorded Picture Company and HanWay Films that, in parenthesis, there is always a space for an independent. Of course, market share and the idea of growing big is something that is viewed as being the only way. But if you look at all the things we love, a lot of those things come from independents. Then they become big and then they become mainstream. But at the beginning they are independent projects.

What keeps you moving forward?

I try and remain in the now, I want to remain in the now, but I am also happy to be informed by people who are of a different generation to me about what people should be doing. Everything is kept within the idea of quality films, high quality cinema.

Does selling to platforms such as Netflix or Amazon give you pause for thought at all?

Initially I was doubtful. But it has become inevitable and I am, and will, embrace it. After all, all the films I have been involved with are much longer in the first cut anyway.

Would you envisage a future where a Jeremy Thomas produced film has a platform investing in it?

Maybe. That’s the area where my problem is. Who is the entrepreneur, the proprietor in this project? I am used to being a proprietor of my films, which I have been less recently because the way a film is put together today doesn’t give me the same opportunity that I had.

Google, Apple – they’re all getting into film, platforms and dominant technology are all getting into the business. Might they represent another place to sell your vision to?

I’m a small boutique but small can be beautiful. I am not a competitor.

Maybe they’d buy a discreet part of your film?

There are many ways to be involved with them and I am learning. I’m having to change. I’ve still got an output in the same way that I’ve been doing. The projects are still being put together as independent films. I think I’ll be able to get away with that for as long as I am making movies. But yes, I am going to try and embrace the new way. BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL (Takashi Miike) is on Netflix, for one.

What excites you about the changing landscape?

It’s new for me. I was pretty happy with the old world order but I need to embrace the new world order. It’s a stimulating challenge. But it will be something very low key for me.

As an internationalist are you looking forward to a bright future with funding coming from global players?

I think my entry into those platforms will be from the outside and not from the UK. I am stronger outside of the UK than I am in the UK.

Is the future of the European film business secure?

I think the European business is secure because people can get cameras and shoot and edit in a very simple way today. And economically you don’t need millions of dollars and it is much easier in some respects than it was. You can make a film with very little. There is opportunity for a lot more people.

London-based Stuart Kemp is a writer and editor specialising in the international entertainment industry. He is also an artist who creates bespoke biographical works using handmade pin badges mounted on canvas called MemoryPop.
There can only be a secure future for European cinema as long as there is sustainability. And that sustainability needs to come from a collective sense of social responsibility (CSR), both from individuals and companies.

CSR and sustainability are hot topics that provoke wider questions: does the film industry create value for society to ensure its social legitimacy in the future? How have the needs and expectations of today's society been changing, and what challenges does that create for the film sector?

Thanks to new technologies, we see contemporary society as part of a global village in which society can increasingly help to provide solutions to the great global challenges of our time. Responsible consumption is a trend that is gaining more and more popularity. This can impact potential audiences for film: More and more people may not consume a product of entertainment and culture if the production has been done in an irresponsible way, and they may also feel an ethical duty to exert pressure and social rejection of industries and companies that do not legitimise themselves socially.

So, how does the film sector create the value to society that is required to ensure its social legitimacy in the future?

While being fully aware of the many contributions of the film sector to society, cinema is on the other hand one of the industries that generates many harmful environmental impacts on a global scale. Film industry leaders can mitigate that impact with good management practices.

The European film sector could start by committing to the objectives in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), introduced in 2016. I highlight some of the goals most relevant to the film world here:

- Gender equality and female empowerment is one key tenet, as expressed in UN SDG #5. This is an issue that the European film industry is already well aware of. For example, the European Women’s Audiovisual Network’s Gender Equality Report that looked at seven European countries from 2006 to 2013 and found that only one in five films was directed by a woman, and that 84% of funding went to films that aren’t directed by women. This is one of the most critical challenges that the film sector has to tackle from the perspective of CSR – filmmaking won’t be sustainable if its narrative is so limited to a single (masculine) vision. In order to meet the expectations of all, audiovisual content must be very diverse and inclusive, especially as it can shape the future outlook of adolescents.

- From a more monetary point of view, the film industry is a source of employment and an instrument of redistribution of wealth. Filmmaking can contribute to the economy also through equipment rental, transportation, telecommunications, security, insurance, hotels, restaurants, and other fields. It is estimated that 30% of total production costs remain in local economies. So, employing workers regardless of gender, race or ethnicity is a necessary good practice. At the other end of the scale, there are millions of people in the world who lack regular access to food. Taking into account UN SDG #2 the film industry could help by donation of surplus catering products to food banks.

- European cinema should also promote access for all; this takes into account UN SDG #10 about reduction of inequalities. Good practices can be established so that people with or without disabilities can go to the cinema together, such as specific colour-coded subtitles for people with hearing disabilities; audio description for people with visual impairment or ambient autism; cinemas or rooms that facilitate access to this audience; training plans for care for people with disabilities; and discounted or free cinema tickets for the caregiver. Audiovisual content can also show characters with different abilities not defined by their disabilities.

- A sustainable film production is one that can maximise its value while minimising its environmental impacts. Sony Pictures employed a full-time independent contractor, Earth Angel, to work on the production of 2014’s THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 2 and achieved a waste diversion rate of 52%. About 50 tons of materials (wood, steel, glass) were donated for future productions and about 6,000 meals donated to community shelters, earning a carbon neutral certification. Sustainable production practices are increasingly being highlighted as a business case. The idea of film eco-supervisors in Europe is one to be developed. This responds to UN SDG Objective #12 about responsible production and consumption and Objective #13 about protection of the planet.
The future and sustainability of the film sector is in the hands of those who produce and consume films. Your hands. To ensure the survival of the sector, the film world needs to satisfy the needs and expectations of an increasingly conscious and committed society. Despite the evidence that sustainable film production can save money, it is still viewed as an emerging concept. The organisation of an industry-wide performance assessment of sustainable film production best practices from around the world could provide consistency across film productions, a platform for documentation and a co-ordinated approach to greening the screen.

European filmmakers need to understand that being sustainable, being green, and being aware of the industry’s corporate social responsibilities will allow the film sector to reach its full potential on the global movie scene – and will ensure its future.

Spain-based Piedad Rojas Roman is a leading expert in Corporate Social Responsibility, with almost two decades of working professionally in this field as a university professor, manager, and consultant. Several of her projects have been recognised as innovative and expert by organisations such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations and the European Marketplace of CSR. She also oversaw Latin America’s first report on University Social Responsibility.

**CREATING YOUR CODE OF CONDUCT**

EFA Deputy Chairman Mike Downey’s production company, Film and Music Entertainment (F&ME), based in Dublin and London, has embraced CSR and shares its code of conduct (below) on its website.

“Over the past 10 years or so, sustainability and corporate social responsibility has blossomed as an idea, if not as a coherent practical programme in most industries,” says Downey. “Whilst it has been slow to take off in the film business, there is now a mood amongst indie producers which define it as the way to go without a doubt.”

“The crucial thing is to start. Start small and build. It doesn’t have to come with a price tag. Just good practice. The simple way to get started with CSR is to create a purpose statement that ties the company’s work to a broader, more meaningful benefit. Partnering with local nonprofit organizations that support causes aligned with your company’s mission and goals.”

Downey continues, “Aside from the basic ‘sustainability 101’ ideas in the manufacturing process, there’s then what I call the ‘ideology factor’ or the ‘good for the planet’ factor. One of our main threads is working with the Street Child United project (https://www.streetchildunited.org/) and we are now on our fourth feature documentary aimed at drawing attention to the fact there are over 100 million street children in the world today – that kind of thing, or the work that we do with the Golden Bear winning Isango Company (http://isangoensemble.co.za/) in the South African Township of Khayelitsha – the company itself whose members support large numbers within the community. It’s a chain of support. And all you need do is make one link.”

Downey shares F&ME’s code of conduct here:

**The Company is committed to the responsible consumption of office supplies and consumables, especially at the pre-production stage,**

- printing only the documents that are necessary and using environmentally friendly office material, especially in relation to paper consumption. This will use PEFC or FSC recycled paper, with low grammage, as well as low environmental impact inks. It will also ensure the recycling of waste (toners, batteries, cartridges, paper, etc.).

- The Company is committed to minimizing the consumption of materials, prioritizing rent over purchase for the acquisition of props, sets and changing rooms, thus avoiding the consumption of materials and the generation of waste in its preparation.

- The Company is committed to the selective collection of waste and subsequent management with carriers and authorized managers.

- The Company commits itself to respect for animal rights – The origin of live animals used for filming must be in accordance with current regulations and international conventions on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora, ensuring at all times an ethical and respectful treatment during the transport and use of the animals.

- The Company is committed to the protection of minors - films in which minors participate must be subject to the values of protection of children and youth. F&ME promises to avoid statements or visual presentations that may cause mental, moral or physical harm to minors.

- The Company is committed to selecting suppliers through CSR criteria. Give preference to those suppliers who can prove their sustainable and responsible behaviour.

- The Company is committed to guarantee the non-exclusion of workers due to race, sex, age, nationality or personal situation.

- The Company is committed to promoting the inclusion of disadvantaged groups at risk of exclusion to carry out those jobs that do not require special qualification.

- The Company is committed to preventing, correcting or minimizing discomfort to citizens living in the vicinity of the external locations, for which the necessary channels of communication are generated with the stakeholders involved.
It has been seven years since George Lucas took the opportunity to lay out the groundstrokes of his vision for the movie houses of the future. Speaking at a panel discussion at the exhibition conference CinemaCon in Las Vegas alongside Jeffrey Katzenberg and James Cameron, the man who had changed the movie landscape with STAR WARS did not talk about making money in the short term, but rather drew a sketch of cinemas taking full advantage of the possibilities of digital projection to stay relevant in a media landscape that was changing rapidly.

Leaving behind their past as the place that only screens films, he envisioned cinemas as something like community centres, where people gather to meet and then decide if they want to see a movie or projections of live entertainment or sports events or any other kind of filmed content. Maybe they would just stay on the premises to get something to eat in a restaurant or have a beer at a bar. That communal experience lay at the heart of Lucas’ vision.

Fast forward to 2018, and you can see that more and more cinemas are to a certain extent adopting some of those ideas. But what was seen as a boon back in 2011, a way into a more shining digital future, did not turn out to be quite that. While the cinema business has remained strong with big blockbusters bringing in a bigger share of revenue, the technological advances have caused a rift, a disruption that is eating away at the core of the business, causing a fundamental change in how content is consumed and in what kind of content people watch in different environments.

In her annual Nostradamus Project report, compiled for the Göteborg Film Festival and Lindholmen Science Park, Sweden-based media analyst Johanna Koljonen painted a rather alarming picture. “We are facing a massive change, a change that could turn out to be devastating especially to the European film industry if we don’t face the challenges head on and work on solutions,” she says. “One cannot rely any longer on the tried and true business model; it is not in sync with the behaviour and demands of the viewers. Right now, we see the first wave of adolescents who have never lived in a world without YouTube, smartphones or streaming platforms.” That generation largely doesn’t have a cinema-going tradition.

Bobby Allen, Head of Content for the London-headquartered boutique streaming platform MUBI, agrees. “We are way past the disruption phase. Disruption happened years ago when smartphones and streaming opened up completely new avenues to access content. It’s not about only movies anymore. People are open to new formats, new approaches to storytelling. We have to find a way to cater to their interests, while offering them something that we feel is worthwhile.”

Curation and communication are the operative words here. It’s what sets MUBI’s approach apart from the ‘see what sticks’ offerings of big streaming players like Netflix or Amazon Prime Video.

While seemingly at odds with each other and using different business models, MUBI brings a balance to the advantages of SVoD and the luxury of going to the movies. “We strongly believe in the theatrical experience, and we want to be part of that dialogue,” Allen says.

In 2016, MUBI started to acquire films for theatrical distribution in the US and the UK, releasing festival hits like THE HAPPIEST DAY IN THE LIFE OF OLLI MAKI, ARABIAN NIGHTS and ON BODY AND SOUL.

In a more radical move, in 2018, the company started a pilot, MUBI Go, to offer its subscribers free tickets to carefully selected new releases in cinemas – films that don’t necessarily have to turn up in MUBI’s streaming programme later. “We need to engage with our customers, we need to offer them something they don’t get anywhere else. MUBI is all about discovering films and our customers engaging with them, so that was a logical progression.”

In many territories the resistance against any changes in the traditional theatrical business model remains fierce. When filmmaker Jakob Lass tried to set up a then-revolutionary deal with German arthouses to show his festival hit LOVE STEAKS day and date with a SVoD launch in 2014, offering the cinemas a share of the SVoD earnings, he was shot down unequivocally.

Nothing much has changed since then. Other countries in Europe have a less dogmatic approach. The British arthouse chain Curzon has been offering a variety of films on its cinema screens while at the same time giving their customers the chance to watch their films at home or on their mobile devices via Curzon Home Cinema.

Another interesting model is the Creative Europe-backed European Cinema & Video Initiative (ECVI), which is made up of Picl in the Netherlands, Kino on Demand in Germany, La Toile in France and Nettikino in Norway. The companies help local cinemas to offer their real-world audiences VOD selections at home.

While still in its formative stages – the initiative was set up early in 2017 – Picl has encouraging numbers to show for its first year, as Anke van Diejen, head of Picl, reports, “The number of films that are being released in cinemas has grown exponentially over the last years and it’s hard for film-lovers to see every film or for cinemas to give them all the attention they need. Since we began with Picl, not only the number of views has quadrupled (and we are still growing), but also the number of physical cinemagoers has grown. Picl as an addition to the cinema.”

“In the Netherlands, a small market, there’s a palpable eagerness from all sides involved to try out new avenues and bring a variety of films especially to audiences who might otherwise not see these films at all, especially an audience of relatively younger people with busy lives”.

“ONE CANNOT RELY ANY LONGER ON THE TRIED AND TRUE BUSINESS MODEL; IT IS NOT IN SYNC WITH THE BEHAVIOUR AND DEMANDS OF THE VIEWERS”

Johanna Koljonen, author of The Nostradamus Project.
Pantaflix on the other hand, started in 2016 by German producer Dan Maag as an offshoot of successful production stable Pantaleon, provides yet another model that makes it unique in the realm of SVoD platforms, not just embracing a world-wide approach, but basing its whole business model in internationality. While there are the usual output deals as well, producers themselves can offer their films to be shown in territories where they don’t have theatrical distribution.

Since Stefan Langefeld, formerly Head of TV and Movies Central and Eastern Europe for iTunes, has taken over as CEO in April 2018, the company has moved into production to gain a foothold in theatrical markets. Commonly seen as a landmark move in the as of yet very fragile co-existence between cinemas and streaming platforms, Netflix will deviate from its hard-line stance to show Netflix Originals movies in cinemas only day-and-date with their respective streaming starts.

Paul Greengrass’ 22 JULY was a first trial balloon, allowing certain cinema chains an exclusive week before the movie went live on Netflix, now followed by an exclusive one-week theatre run for Alfonso Cuaron’s Venice winner ROMA before it hits Netflix.

“I see it as quite a remarkable statement,” says Bero Beyer, a former producer who has been director of the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) since 2015. For years, the IFFR has been regarded as a true trailblazer for experimenting with new technological advances and thereby questioning the traditional role of film festivals. Always willing to push the boundaries, the festival was one of the first to work with films year round, an approach that has been adopted by other festivals like Toronto, Berlin or Locarno.

Once again, Rotterdam is ready to explore new avenues. “We have got our IFFR Unleashed streaming programme up and running, broadening our reach and establishing a new way to communicate,” Beyer says. “But I think this is not much more than part of a logical progression, a necessary step. To be revolutionary, you have to be more forward thinking. We are trying to connect the content with the context the festival provides, so it evolves into more than just watching a film, the spectator becomes a participant in shaping the content.”

It’s unclear as of yet how that will influence the future of cinema programming. What’s certain is that the traditional model of distributing films is, considering who you talk to, at least under pressure or already broken. Prokino has been one of the most successful independent distributors in Germany for the past 40 years, renowned for its careful programming and innovative marketing. Managing director Ira von Gienanth says, “Film distributors always have a curatorial, editorial view on which films to collect to bring to their national audiences. However, in a world of surplus it is more and more difficult to find the space to make these choices visible ... audiences are especially demanding right now; they are risk-averse on how and where to spend their free time.”

She continues, “So either the selling points are well-known auteurs or a must-see cast, which makes it difficult for any young director. There are few chances for middling films, for films that had good intentions, but somehow didn’t work out. Which means we have to work even more closely together with producers and directors to make the best film possible on the market. And show more courage on all sides, since the few last years have also shown that daring or uncomfortable – but essentially stirring – movies do find audiences.”

Von Gienanth points out the growing challenges in the cinema market, but remains resolutely hopeful, if exhibitors only found a way to keep going to the movies exciting. “Only exhibitors that still understand their audiences will get results and create the communal experience that a cinema should deliver. Might that lie in the selection of films, or in finding the right times to suit a modern life, like the Lunchkino series in Switzerland, the early bird screenings at 6:30am at the Viennale, the two-days-only event screenings in Italy or the outdoor cinemas in Poland, on rooftops or in parks. Possibilities are endless, if we only use them.”

Koljonen agrees with that assessment. There’s no need to become disillusioned. Yet. “The young audiences still like to watch movies on the big screen, they love the experience,” says Koljonen. “What they don’t like about going to the cinema is what happens before and after the screenings. They feel uncomfortable and not welcome. At this point, it’s still in the hands of the cinemas to alter the course: They have to be more receptive to the wants and needs of their audience if they want to stay in business.”

Maybe Lucas’ seven-year-old idea is not such a bad way to start: As successful examples show, be it the Alamo Drafthouse cinemas in the US or bespoke neighbourhood theatres like Wolf Kino in Berlin, making the cinema a place where you want to spend time and engage in communication, a community centre of sorts, can make them an indispensable part of how filmed content will be consumed in the foreseeable future.

Munich-based Thomas Schulze has worked for German trade magazine Blickpunkt.Film for the past 28 years. After having served as chief film critic and editor since 2003, he has been appointed as one of two editors in chief in 2017.
According to Sol Bondy, co-founder of the Berlin-based One Two Films, the future of cinema doesn’t seem in danger at all.

The physical cinema, he says, will continue to exist in the exhibitive space, growing in two directions. “I assume there will be more theatres with seats getting more comfortable and the popcorn getting bigger. They will draw lots of people to the screenings with event movies, and at the same time, there still will be need for the arthouse theatres, carefully curated for local communities. A very good example of this is the Wolf Kino in Berlin.”

His fear is that the repetitive business of superhero movies that’s been going on for years, will continue. “For the studios, the cinematic landscape is turning more monotone and monopolistic. Most films are sequels, prequels or in-betwequels. For independent films, the budgets for arthouse films are shrinking. The middle ground has nearly vanished completely.”

He draws a parallel to current plans by Disney to withdraw their films from Netflix and create its own streaming service. “At the same time, they are not being as innovative as they once were, with the strength of big studios run by people who took risks to make films that challenge the audience.”

A few years ago, piracy was the big issue, but now that the streaming platforms have generated enough exciting content, people are actually spending the money they used to spend for cinema tickets on subscriptions to two, maybe three different platforms. The big advantage is the enormous knowledge gathered about viewers, with the whole business model based on data and how to use it to create revenue. “Netflix knows what we like to watch, but Amazon knows what we like to buy, too! Privacy is going to be the ultimate value of the future.”

TV is an area that One Two might explore soon, as he sees some drama series now as akin to “long cinema”. “We are interested in tapping into that direction. The world is getting smaller, the networks are getting more important and you can be afraid of it or see it as an opportunity, and I prefer to choose the latter.” And the networks and streaming platforms are investing heavily. “We are still in a time and space where content is being thrown at us in order to understand the taste of audiences, I think we haven’t reached the end of our appetite yet.”

Bondy says he is interested in TV series because of the richness of characters and the possibility of explaining more complex ideas. And there’s another exciting silver lining: “With the support of big streaming platforms like Netflix, the whole complexity and time-consuming work of financing disappears. You strike one deal and that’s it – all that’s left is to start shooting.”

He continues, “And it’s also been fascinating to watch how the TV landscape has put creators, writers and show-runners in focus. In cinema, we are still working in a very director-driven space.”

Together with Jami Li Wenke and Christoph Lange, he set up One Two Films in Berlin in 2010; the company is currently co-producing Icelandic director Grímur Hákonarson’s THE COUNTY; re-uniting with Israel’s Tom Shovav on SHAKE YOUR CARES AWAY, planning Birgit Möller’s German comedy FRANKY FIVE STAR, and developing two English-language films with Canada’s Mike MacMillan, I WILL NOT GO QUIETLY and NIGHTLIFE.

For Bondy, cinema is still king. Looking back at two of One Two Films’ latest co-productions, THE HAPPIEST DAY IN THE LIFE OF OLLI MÄKI (which won EFA’s European Discovery – Prix Fipresci in 2016) and THE TALE, recently nominated for two Primetime Emmys, he concludes: “Nothing beats the experience of being told a great story. That is something that will never change.”

Marina D. Richter is a Belgrade-born, Vienna-based film critic. She writes for publications including Cineuropa, Politika, Vreme, Lupiga & Monitor, Film.uk and Sirp. She is also a published author and script advisor.
LINA FLINT: ‘GOOD IDEAS CAN TRAVEL’

By Wendy Ide

The producer of the Danish foreign-language Oscar submission and EFA European Discovery nominee, THE GUILTY, Lina Flint believes that the future of European cinema depends on the borders between countries being increasingly open to the exchange of ideas and collaborations.

It’s an idea that she describes herself as “obsessed” with. “What I want to do in the future is work more closely together with different European countries. I want to have more of an exchange of creative talents. I want to collaborate with other European countries, in terms of actors, writers, directors. I would love to shoot a Danish film in another country. I think that the time is changing. The boundaries between the countries should not be as set as they are. Good ideas can travel.”

She elaborates, talking about her future projects with the Copenhagen-based collective Nordisk Film Spring, which she founded three years ago with THE GUILTY co-writer Emil Nygaard Albertsen. “Now we have a series and we are talking to a British company about it; and we have a TV show that will shoot in Spain. I would like to freshen things up in that sense.”

And the borders between different formats are equally permeable. “The directors and writers I work with want to do both [television and film]. We have some ideas which started as films and ended up as series, and some the other way around. So we are definitely not afraid of the different formats.”

This openness extends to other forms like augmented reality and virtual reality. “I produce animation films as well, and I work with a very talented animation director (William Reynish). He is very into new technologies, especially augmented reality. He is looking at how we can use that, both as a distribution and advertising tool. And if we can make our animation films live on different platforms, we are keen to explore that.

“I think we still need to crack the code in terms of VR,” she continues. “The things that I have seen that work the best are when you just get to experience a place or a feeling. It’s not working that well in terms of storytelling yet.”

The main worry for the future, as far as Flint is concerned, is domestic funding. “I am a bit worried that the government we have now is cutting down on cultural support. That’s a shame – but at the same time I know that we are really lucky in Denmark that we have a lot of film support from the government. They are financing 50 percent of films that are done in Denmark. But they are cutting it down now so that is a concern.”

She also identifies a need for improvement in the mechanisms to connect content with an audience. “In terms of the audience, I think the biggest challenge is that you can produce very cheaply now, and that means that a lot of people are producing things, both good and bad. For me, as an audience member, I find it difficult, there is just so much content, I find it a bit confusing. That is a challenge for the audience – what is actually made for me? It becomes disorientating.

“We are in tune with it. But normal people, how should they manage it? Netflix used to be a quality stamp. It’s not like that anymore. They take everything. So where should you go to find your next good fix of content? I think we are confusing our audiences by producing so much.”

Wendy Ide is a film critic and feature writer for The Observer, Screen International and Prospect, among others. Previously, she has served as a film critic for The Times, Elle and The Sunday Herald.
VESELKA KIRYAKOVA: ‘PEOPLE NEED PURE CINEMA’

By Marina D. Richter

When it comes to the future of film production, Bulgarian producer Veselka Kiryakova, whose credits include ALIENATION and ÁGA, isn’t very optimistic. “I think that getting money will become even more difficult, especially for arthouse movies. The law for Bulgarian cinema is about to change very soon, and I am facing thoughts about what kind of cinema our government wants to support.”

Despite challenges in terms of financing and expanding the audience, she doesn’t feel compelled to explore the new storytelling formats or platforms. “Here in Bulgaria, people are not interested in going to the cinema to see arthouse movies. I guess that this will become a world-wide phenomenon because of VOD platforms.” She feels that the streaming giants don’t care about the quality of content they are supporting, because they only want to meet norms.

She hopes that the whole ecosystem can change. “Arthouse films belong to theatres, and people have lost their interest in going to theatres for different kinds of reasons … Since this is happening, the cinema will have to change itself in order to fit to the new way of life, and I am trying to open myself to that.”

Finding the professional connection to rapid changes is a big challenge. “Everybody is trying to fit in. I am watching a lot of movies with different cinematographic languages and they are already adjusting themselves to the new times.”

“Not going with the flow can be risky, but I am not ready to compromise just to be able to keep my head above water,” she continues.

Some of the changes she has noticed are “feature films are becoming more documentary-like, as professional actors are substituted by amateurs and the shaky, hand-held camera is coming into fashion. I can’t say where exactly this is leading to, except that the boundaries between fiction and documentary get blurrier with every year. It all makes me curious about the future state of things.”

So, what does really excite her about the future? “People need pure cinema and I am curious to see the path of its return and how it will change. I am sure that it will find its way, because what people want from cinema is to see a film they’ll get emotionally attached to, a very simple story with something that will touch their hearts.”

She is excited about finding those new ideas and stories to tell. “There are so many stories already told and there’s always a danger of repetitiveness. And then there are those hidden unexplored territories with the potential of catching the interest of the audience. I am open for honest projects with deep messages.”

That’s why she is cautious about emerging technologies of VR, MR and AR. “They absolutely have a future, because the times are changing, and new things will keep on appearing. For me, virtual reality, for instance, is something I associate with gaming only and it doesn’t tickle my imagination beyond that.”

Sharing the risk across film and TV can help any producer to keep their business alive and she is now producing a children’s series for Bulgarian national television.

Kiryakova has three arthouse film projects in development: Pavel G. Vesnakov’s drama DECONSTRUCTION about a middle-aged man whose days as astronomer in the observatory on Mount Rozhen are about to end; Kosta Bikov’s documentary RANGEL FOREVER about the Bulgarian director Rangel Vulchanov; and Grigor Antonov’s DORA, a drama about an aged former movie star and her relationship to two young tenants.

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IVAN MADEO: ‘DIVERSITY WILL ALWAYS BE THE RIGHT WAY FOR THE FUTURE OF EUROPE’

By Wendy Ide

For Ivan Madeo, co-founder of Contrast Film, which operates out of Zurich and Bern, Switzerland, the future of European cinema is an opportunity to be grasped.

“What excites me the most is that I don’t know what the future holds. I just know that it will be changing. I hate routine business. That we have to be open-minded is actually the thing that I like the most.”

The industry, he points out, has always changed and evolved. The difference now is the accelerated pace at which those changes are happening. “It’s changing our business models, that’s maybe scary. But there are new doors opening and I think we should go and take these doors.”

The new doors that Madeo refers to lead, he says, to long-form projects and streaming platforms. “We have this gradual migration from cinema to TV and online, and that might be frightening for some people but, as with any structural change, it is also an opportunity.

“Honestly, I believe that streaming platforms like Netflix are not the danger for the future. These platforms, with the productions they are making, are still preserving creativity and enriching culture, for the moment.”

He strikes a note of caution, however. “In my opinion, the big danger is more in the, let’s call them ‘stupid’ streaming platforms which are emerging everywhere. The dumb ones. The ones for which content is not king. Content is function. These platforms that simply fill up their channels with anything, no matter what. And that is indeed life-threatening. You go into a direction in which a machine can invent and construct content and you don’t need creativity, you don’t need directors, you don’t need producers anymore.”

So what are the challenges ahead for European filmmakers? “The fact that there are so many more films than we used to have before, that is really a huge issue for all the funds. How do you decide who will get money and who will not? The criteria are difficult to define. I think, in general, Europe should focus on its strength, which is diversity. I think it should be in the DNA of all European film funds – the respect of otherness, of diversity. I think we should do whatever is possible to tear down the walls and the borders between countries and enable these European co-productions so that the films that we make here show the diversity of our everyday life. If funds have to make decisions about what direction to go in, what films to support, I would always say, here in Europe, go for diversity. That will always be the right way for the future of Europe.”

Madeo, Stefan Eichenberger and Urs Frey’s Contrast recently produced Swiss debut feature MIDNIGHT RUNNER and they have a busy slate ahead: documentary CAVE MAN, by Italy’s Tommaso Landucci; Oliver Rieh’s STORM to shoot in Switzerland, Germany and Spain; Christine Repond’s controversial pedophilia drama MARLEN’S GARDEN and Mauro Mueller’s French-language THE GOOD REPUTATION.

The future for Madeo and for Contrast includes their first steps into serial storytelling, as the company is also eying a big-budget European TV series co-production. “I must say I am very excited. We don’t know what the result will be because we are still in the middle of it, but the opportunity to deepen characters and topics is really fascinating.”

On a broader level, Madeo is looking to the future with a commitment to tackling difficult subjects. “We have decided to be very strict in the selection of our projects; we are going into a direction of making films looking at the non-comfortable side of life. There are so many films saying how beautiful life is, especially in Switzerland where I come from. I mean, it’s a pretty country. Everything seems to be perfect. If you look under the surface – how Swiss people live, not how other people perceive Swiss people to be – we have just as many problems. We want to show that actually, Switzerland is not as boring, or as perfect, as you might think.”

Wendy Ide is a film critic and feature writer for The Observer, Screen International and Prospect, among others. Previously, she has served as a film critic for The Times, Elle and The Sunday Herald.
EMILY MORGAN: ‘BREXIT COULD PUSH US TO BE MORE EUROPEAN’

By Wendy Ide

For Emily Morgan, the producer of I AM NOT A WITCH, as for many other UK-based film industry professionals, the uncertainties of Brexit loom large in any view of the immediate future. She describes it, succinctly, as “the big, terrifying thing.” But while many questions about the post-Brexit future of British film production within Europe are simply unanswerable at the moment, Morgan does strike a cautiously optimistic note.

“I would hope that after Brexit, because of Brexit, we will be more focused. Given that the majority of people working in the arts are anti-Brexit, I think it is almost going to push us to be more European and international than before, given what a wake-up call this has been. That’s the silver lining, I hope. My work is very international. I have always dreamt of being a co-producer and I am trying to develop as many projects like that as possible.”

Recent panels and discussions at the BFI London Film Festival and MIA in Rome dealing with the thorny topic of post-Brexit coping strategies have also given Morgan some hope for the future. “It made me realise that it’s not all necessarily bleak. There’s a chance that the UK might be able to re-join EURIMAGES. And that the UK government would try to put other things in place if we lost MEDIA money. Because that’s the big fear, that MEDIA funding would drop away. And not just for my area of development and production, but for distribution as well. It would just be so sad, if companies like Curzon Artificial Eye can’t pick up the same films and put them into cinemas because they wouldn’t have the same Creative Europe support, the landscape here would be so much poorer.”

The Creative Europe/MEDIA distribution support, is, she says, particularly important now, as the number of films produced continues to increase. “It’s more competitive than ever but at least there are a lot of platforms. This is where the MEDIA distribution funding is so key – to cut through the noise from all the studio films. I hope that cultural support continues, I don’t know if festivals are thriving financially, but they seem to be booming. The London Film Festival was just alive. The screenings were full and sold out. It was amazing.”

Meanwhile, Morgan finds the current drive towards diversity and representation within the industry a source of hope for the future. I AM NOT A WITCH, which is the UK’s foreign-language Oscar submission, won Rungano Nyoni the 2018 BAFTA for Outstanding Debut, and had a nine-year-old Zambian girl as its protagonist. Another female-centric film that Morgan is currently finishing for a 2019 launch is MAKE UP, Claire Oakley’s psychological thriller set in Cornwall with a young woman as its lead.

“I am very encouraged about women in cinema, film production being a lot more inclusive and a lot more diverse. That has naturally been the kind of work that I gravitate towards so it’s amazing for me now that there is a markedly bigger platform. I just feel more confident now, applying for funds and meeting investors. The kind of films I dream of producing I feel are just more accepted and even sought out. It’s particularly noticeable within organisations like the BFI, which has its amazing diversity drive. It has helped, there is definitely a movement towards achieving parity.”

Outside of the cinema arena, Morgan is currently excited by the potential of long-form projects. “So much amazing stuff is being made, the crossover between film and television has resulted in really fertile creative territory. And Netflix and Amazon – having everything readily available – makes it easier for audiences to connect with.”

What future changes would she like to see in an ideal world? “I would like the diversity push to continue and for Brexit not to happen.”

Wendy Ide is a film critic and feature writer for The Observer, Screen International and Prospect, among others. Previously, she has served as a film critic for The Times, Elle and The Sunday Herald.
Beata Rzeźniczek: ‘We Need to Use the Advantages of Every Media’

By Marina D. Richter

“When you claim something is ‘future’, you visualise it only one way,” says Beata Rzeźniczek of the Polish production company Madants, explaining that the future of projects should depend on their nature. “Some are destined to be shown in the cinema and have theatrical distribution, but some have no future without the support of streaming platforms. I think it’s crucial to recognize which way any project should be presented.”

The Warsaw-based producer, who recently co-produced Claire Denis’ first English-language feature HIGH LIFE, believes the changes in the film business bring opportunities that can be further developed in the future. Although it involves the danger of cinemas dying out, one should not ignore new technologies. “Whatever comes needs to be approached and I am excited about all challenges that come with it.”

Rzeźniczek points out that people living in small communities without access to cinemas can really benefit from streaming platforms. Marketing quality films needs to improve, whether on platforms or at cinemas, so audiences don’t just opt for easily digestible romcoms or violent thrillers. She says, “focusing on how to sell culture to people should be one of the film industry’s ultimate goals.”

Along with TV, new forms of storytelling are gaining popularity in Poland, which she sees as another opportunity. “There are YouTube channels showing webisodes, and if you look up the number of viewers, they are not insignificant. You never know what might come out of that.” She points to the example of Hagar Ben-Asher’s DEAD WOMAN WALKING, which started out as a nine-webisode project and became a feature film.

Rzeźniczek says that although the future seems to be on the internet, lots of people currently make a move from online to television. “Today’s aim is TV. It might come to reverse roles, and the internet will become the ultimate goal,” she adds.

When it comes to the future of film producing, she doesn’t see emerging technologies as a threat. “Despite of current situation, I think that cinema will never die and it’s always the story that matters the most. We need to learn to use the advantages of every media available and to adjust,” she explains. “That’s why diversification of activities is key.”

Rzeźniczek admits she prefers standard storytelling formats but may have a small flirt with virtual reality [VR] elements in an upcoming hip-hop musical project. “We hope to collaborate with the VR producer and learn about the technology and marketing, and at the same time I think that VR is going to meet the same destiny as 3D. There is a huge interest in it, but I don’t believe it’s going to replace the classical cinema. It is something worth exploring.” She adds that it would be interesting to make a study about how new technologies shape the brain.

Financing and launching projects in Europe will remain difficult, she suggests, unless working on more commercially oriented crime or romance stories. “Financing is never easy, especially if you have a feature debut with difficult content and yet, it’s still easier to produce than to distribute films. There are so many projects on the market, that it’s getting progressively difficult to distribute and sell a film,” she says adding that another great challenge for the cinema will be attracting new audiences considering many options they have to choose from.

Meanwhile, the always-busy Rzeźniczek has two new projects ahead: Israeli director Hagar Ben-Asher’s THE WAR HAS ENDED, which won the EURIMAGES Co-Production Development Award and ARTE International Prize at the Berlinale’s 2018 Co-Production Market; and a debut film by a Polish filmmaker Aleksandra Tepinska, which is an adaptation of the novel Other People by Dorota Maslowska.

Another door to new possibilities could open through NEM Corp, a new production company that Madants’ Klaudia Smieja & Rzeźniczek have founded with producer Ewa Puszczyska (COLD WAR) and sales executives Jan Naszewski and Katarzyna Siniarska of New Europe Film Sales. Its aim is to support more high-quality international projects in Poland.

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