Tools for European Screenwriters' Training

TEST

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Welcome !

Date: 2005-01-14 14:00:04
Posted by: TEST (**test@uimp.es**)   [**reply to this message**]
Subject: **Antonio Saura´s FIRST SET OF CONCLUSIONS**   [**back to the index**]

Antonio Saura, the moderator of this forum, has drawn the first set of conclusions from the discussion that took place here during the past two months.

You are invited to give your view on these conclusions. We are very much interested if you agree with these conclusions, and even more if you do not agree.
+ attachment(s) to this message: **Conclusiones a 14 de enero.doc**

Date: 2005-01-10 19:15:22
Posted by: Claes Lillieborg - Stockholm   [**reply to this**
(**claes.lillieborg@chello.se**)   **message**]
Subject: **Some views on the TEST FORUM ONLINE debate -**   [**back to the**
from a new comer   **index**]

Some comments on the TEST ONLINE Forum

As I was invited to participate in the debate as late as in November 2004 I spent the Christmas holidays reading most of what has been communicated in the ONLINE Forum.

As most of you don't know me – and I wasn't a part of last years seminar I start with a short introduction. I've been professionally involved in media activities since 1976, writing, directing and producing for TV and cinema. Since July 2004 I'm head of a three year scriptwriting programme at the University of Umeå in northern Sweden (although I'm still living in Stockholm). (Outside the Swedish national film school "Dramatiska Institutet" this is the only programme that gives the student an exam in scriptwriting in Sweden.)

I hope my experiences can be of some use for your network and looking forward receiving the possibility to get access to your activities.

My reflections on your debate.

Generally I find many aspects of the debate important to follow up. Some thoughts – by for instance Dr Patrick Catrrysse – about the necessity to look at the needs of training not only for scriptwriters, as to the skills of writing, but also for the directors, the producers etc is very essential for the development of film and TV in the future.

The model of traditional film schools tends to conserves the way of thinking and working within the industry. People already in the industry or having left it teaches the newcomers how to behave – all based "on the holy sixpack" i.e. a way of producing that seems to be impossible to change even if the world around is all new. How could one believe that it is possible to develop a new European film if there is no ways of communicating changes in the way how to produce film and TV and how to develop ideas and projects?

Working in mostly in Scandinavia bur also in the rest of Europe and co producing with North America I agree that it is difficult to talk about "European films" and "American films" without define a lot of things beforehand.

For instance there is often a misunderstanding that Scandinavia is built upon one basic culture and tradition. Even if we speak similar languages in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and parts of Finland, there are seldom any films travelling easy over borders even in Scandinavia. But we produce together so in the long run it should be possible to build bridges not only between neighbours in Europe but also between commercial cultures that seems to be impossible to combine.

As I been part of the "Industry" for several years and also participating in seminars and courses both in Sweden and in different countries in Europe I find it very important that one tries to find what perspective the discussion will try to focus on.

In that sense it is more the understandable that on TEST the focus lies on the training of scriptwriters and the training of trainers. On the other hand as leader of a university programme in scriptwriting (part of the "Ivory tower"!) and as a part of the industry I find it very hard not to discuss the problem of both TV and Film sector as to the competence level of decision making and structuring the industry as a whole.

But the training has to work both ways. I would say that it is very important to higher the level of competence in all fields as to directors, producers, decision makers at TV, commissioning editors, dramaturgists, readers etc. etc.

I will try to guide my students as much as possible to the knowledge how the industry works. But through experience I know that they will after university meet a world where many of the decision makers hardly know what a dramaturgist does and much more frightening just wants to adapt the scriptwriter to the ideas of the decision maker. Sometimes under the label of "knowing what works with the public". As being a producer I very well know that a lot of scriptwriters haven't the slightest clue of what is possible to achieve in the "real world". But as for a development of the skills of the scriptwriters in Europe I find it essential that we also look upon the creative process that is fundamental for the work that is being done.

As I formed the three year programme in scriptwriting i found it essential to respect the time of the developing process. Certainly it differs because of what kind of work you are involved with but the process has its own clock that you within some limits can differ but on the whole it is more or less fixed to the function of our brains. Does the industry as a whole care about that? No, of course not. It cares about good seasons for openings, right weather for filming, actors who are available and so on. You all know that this is a field of dreams and horror at the same time. Dreams of our minds and not seldom a hard struggle in all ways to fulfil them.

Very much of the activities in our different industries are very precisely calculated. I wish that a production of a film in some way cold be more calculated and especially for the sake of the writer, and the director and the producer and everybody that have to be there when the job has to be done.

Every film, every TV-series is more or less a prototype. We have to love to work with new ideas

all the time; otherwise we would have chosen another filed to work within. But I think a lot of troubles cold be out of our minds if we had a training in all fields, that included the aspects of all people involved in the process of developing projects and scripts.

I had a talk with a Swedish feature film producer a week ago and we were discussing a possible feature film project. During the talk we compared our experiences of working with Swedish directors and found that the lack of knowledge how to develop a script was something that more or less everybody suffered from. The second important skill many were missing was the ability to work close to a scriptwriter and accepting the skills of a gifted talent compared with the lack of their own. But in that field one can see a new world coming up. The death of the very strong auteur epoch at least in Sweden seems to be coming soon. But there is still a long way to go and I hope that TEST will continue to do so even if it is impossible to cover all aspects in one year of debating online.

Date: 2004-12-20 11:45:19
Posted by: TEST
Subject: **Summary of discussion so far**

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THE NEED TO TRAIN: In the discussion it was agreed that the training of (professional) screenwriters is needed/wanted for a couple of reasons: writing is a very solitary job, writers lack understanding of the industry and training helps to improve the status of the writer, whose authority is very low.

EUROPEAN TRAINING PROGRAMS: In recent years a lot of training programmes for professional screenwriters have emerged in Europe. This is very confusing for potential participants, because it is hard to differentiate between programs. Apart from that, training programmes are more and more competing with each other for participants. The entrance level has therefore gone down. Training programmes have to accept participants that can affort to pay the fee, rather than looking at the quality of their project. In theory longer training courses would be better for participants, but the reality is that the longer the course, the younger and less experienced participants seem to be. To attract professionals working in the industry training courses need to be short, or at least as flexible as possible, with one or two group workshops, interspersed with on-line tuition and guidance.

TRAINING AND REALITY: Tutors and producers agreed that the experience of writing for a living is far different than that what most writing courses teach: writers lack understanding of the industry and there should be more understanding between writers and producers. Writers often have the idea that creativity and commercial demands can not go together: the result is a vast number of products that are routine, worthless and doomed to oblivion. What screenwriters especially need to learn is how to deal with critique and how to work in teams.

(2004-12-17)

Date: 2005-01-14 09:38:44
Posted by: Jan Fleischer
Subject: **RE: Summary of discussion so far**

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I certainly agree with these observations. I would only add that the better understanding of writers and their needs from the side of the producers is also necessary; it is not only screenwriters who need to learn.

Date: 2004-12-20 01:37:35
Posted by: Steve Solot (**sasolot@attglobal.net**)
Subject: **General Comment on MPA Screenwriting Training**

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Just a brief comment on our Motion Picture Association perspective to add to the thread of discussion: As I explained at the TEST Seminar the MPA focus on screenwriting training is inherently linked to the real potential of getting the writer's work onto the screen. The MPA member companies are seriously interested in identifying "filmable" screenplays, which has been a formidable task in our region. Thus our most successful Workshop model used in Latin America includes a direct link to producers (MPA and others, and is often combined with a competition. A good example is the recent SGAE-EGEDA-MPA Workshop & Competition in Madrid. In this model, following a two month workshop/tutorial for 16 professional writers, a jury selects the best 3 projects, which will receive wide exposure among US studios and independents, as well as an opportnity to personally pitch the project during one week in Los Angeles. Our mandate is to contribute to training of writers with the specific purpose of leading to production of their work. Since we are not equipped to provide the technical training for writers to learn their trade from scratch, we rely on film schools and other basic training to prepare them before they participate in our workshops as professionals.

Steve Solot, MPA Regional Office for Latin America

Date: 2004-12-17 14:19:08
Posted by: Nicholas Proferes (**nickproferes@aol.com**)
Subject: **Antonio Saura's conclusions**

I agree with all of the conclusions that Mr. Saura has stated. Europeans need trained screenwriters, there are many programs of varying quality, there is a generally low quality of projects mostly because of inexperienced participants. What is the solution to all of this?

I think TEST has to take the bull by the horns, and rate the various programs. One criteria would be in results -- the films made. Rating would weed out those programs that are defecient.

MFI, where I am a trainer, does not charge for the program. More of such free programs is advisable.

Not all programs should be training professionals. Offering courses to the uninitiated would begin to insure a steady stream of new talent. (I teach at Columbia University and many of our best students have no previous experience.)

Much can be accomplished via e-mail, and in fact, can be preferrable. To have a hard copy of a completed script before me gives me more time to come up with solutions and offer detailed notes.

I'm not sure of the quality of the trainers. I realize that this might be a sore spot, but perhaps each trainer should submit their approach.

The biggest problem that I see is lack of imagination in the participants. Stories are weak, or nonexistent. Face to face meetings would be most profitable if they were limited to "inventing the story". Concocting in a group with guidance from the trainer can be very helpful. In other words, more talking the stroy in the face to face. Let the writing take place once the story is gotten out.

Of course we must first choose participants. How do we do that. A simple treatment of no more than ten pages can give us a very good clue as to the potential for a cinematic story. It would then be up to us to help craft that story into a screenplay.

Date: 2004-11-17 16:54:43
Posted by: Webmaster (**benjamin@focal.ch**)
Subject: **Welcome !**

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