

Film Labs Should Be Communities

An Interview with Matthieu Darras, Artistic Director of TorinoFilmLab

Matthieu Darras is TorinoFilmLab's artistic director. He cooperates with various film talents initiatives such as When East Meets West's First Cut Lab or Venice Production Bridge. As a festival programmer, he notably worked for Cannes Critics' Week, and is currently delegate of the San Sebastian Film Festival in charge of Eastern Europe. He's a contributor to the film magazine *Positif*; he founded & directed the European Network of Young Cinema NISI MASA.

Radim Procházka is a prominent Czech producer working recently at Prague's film school FAMU on his PhD research about the industry activities of festivals. He is signed under 15 feature films, including 6 fictions, that received Czech and international awards (most recently he premiered at Vison du Réel 2018 with his Latvian colleague Guntis Trekteris' feature essay from the Latvian-Russian border *D Is for Division* (dir. Davis Simanis). He is a member of the European Film Academy and mentor at the international department of FAMU.

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What was your personal motivation to organise workshops for filmmakers?

What interests me most is to understand people's paths to making films. When I look back on my passion for cinema, I've always enjoyed reading interviews with filmmakers and biographies. And there has been a shift in how people come to make films. When I was a teenager, 20 years ago, practically the only way to make films was to belong to a certain community. It feels like in the past it was much less democratic, in the sense that it was usually people from certain kinds of families, or from the same cultural backgrounds that were making films. It would not be the son of a shoemaker, as they were more likely to make shoes than films. There used to be a major hurdle of legitimacy to make films. For me as well, perhaps one of the reasons I have not made films is that it only felt legitimate for people from specific social backgrounds. With cinema, there is a lot of money involved, so there is the question of: "Am I entitled to spend all this money to make films?" The barrier was so high that you ended up not doing it at all. For example, when I started making a documentary at the age of 18, it was very difficult to get access to a camera and to actually make documentaries. And it's not only the access to the technical tools, it is also the access to a state of

mind which makes you think: “Yes, I am able to do it”. Not to say that it’s always only the same milieu that reproduces itself. But in the case of people, who — despite their social background — nevertheless make films, they always had to find alternative ways.

The case of Federico Fellini is quite exemplary. He began as a journalist. At some point, he got into contact with a kind of little factory of people writing scripts and started out helping with the scripts. He was a scriptwriter for a long time before he started directing. He took a path that is not the same as someone like Luchino Visconti, for instance, who came from an aristocratic family. If some people of the industry accepted you because of your passion, they would put you on the set and for many directors — I focus on the directors — the traditional path was to be assistant director for many years. Today, if you look at the young talents, I rarely see some with thorough experience as assistant directors. It is a kind of companionship. For example, in the last workshop we had a filmmaker from Greece, Thanos Anastopoulos (he had a film in Cannes last May),¹⁾ and he shared experiences from his past. He was born in 1965, perhaps one of the last generations where assisting a master was a must. He explained that he started to make a short film all by himself, and he was pushing Theo Angelopoulos to get an internship in order to stay close to him and to be on the set.

Now the system is different. I don’t know if it’s a democratic transition but these different kinds of pitching sessions and trainings definitely provide access to cinema to different kinds of people. Of course, there are still social barriers, but they are not as insurmountable as before. In French cinema, the main companies are often family dynasties: there are always some daughters of someone, nephews of someone, etc. Most participants

from Latin America also come, for example, from very upper social classes. And they are definitely not aware that there are still some major barriers for other kinds of people. This explosion of initiatives now provides the access that the industry itself doesn’t provide any longer. Previously, the cinema industry trained itself through hands-on apprenticeships. As I have said, there were a great number of people gaining experience on set and later giving chances to others. It seems that now the industry itself is not investing as much in new people in this way. Perhaps because film people don’t have the means to do it, maybe it’s something else. Those trajectories you could observe in the past were sideways. One had to fight a great deal and didn’t have immediate access to prestigious positions as producers or directors. You had to wait, as, for example, an outsider in France, Maurice Pialat, who made his first film when he was 42-years-old. This was because he was not from the right social background, unlike most of the New Wave people.

Francois Truffaut was the producer of Maurice Pialat’s film — as a generation they did support each other.

This is exactly why I decided to create NISI MASA,²⁾ which is all about supporting one other, doing things collectively. I felt I was doing things on my own and a little bit isolated from others. Somehow reading about these film communities from the past led me to create NISI MASA. I was being nostalgic about these movements and fantasizing about something I never experienced myself. Cinema is much more individualistic at present, but there are still some places where, maybe not for the entire career but at least for some time, people support each other and do films working in different positions. Next week, for example, I am going to Colombia to visit

1) *The Last resort* (Thanos Anastopoulos, Davide Del Degan, 2016).

2) NISI MASA was founded in 2001. It is the European network of different cinema associations, currently present in 26 countries. It organizes workshops, film labs and other kinds of networking. Online: <<http://nisi-mazine.nisimasa.com/>> [accessed 10 April 2018].

a film shooting, and the producer of the film is also a director himself. They change positions depending on the project.

You can see it clearly in current Czech cinema. It has been working for years in documentaries and now with the new generation of fiction directors as well. Vít Zapletal, director of Dust of the Ground, was the assistant director to Olmo Omerzu (A Night Too Young, Family film), and they are still co-operating in many ways. The main character (Václav Hrzina as Vašek) is the schoolmate of a director from FAMU in one of the films that premiered here at the festival³⁾ in 2015, Journey to Rome by Tomek Milenik. You can now see these principles very clearly and strongly. They make completely different films, but they remain very close, supporting one other.

Yes. Actually, this question of who is allowed access to cinema was very “endogenic” in the past. But it’s just an observation. One could argue, for example, that Sofia Coppola is very good because she saw her father making films when she was a kid. I, for example, am quite skilled at cooking because my family has a restaurant. Just because I observed things. It makes sense to have these generations of shoemakers, who pass on their craft. The same goes for the cinema. Cinema, however, is about representing the world and this leads to a limited representation of the world. I think what happened in the last 20 or 30 years is that there is a new process of legitimization for people. The main model for access to the profession has become film schools and short films. The most typical trajectory at present for directors is that they manage to enter a film school, which is really the first gatekeeper of who is accepted. There is a lot of discussion in some countries about this. In France, for example, I know many very talented film people who have in common the

fact that they were not accepted by a film school. The criteria of these film schools are a big issue.

Did you apply yourself? Was that your own experience?

I did try, when I knew that I wanted to be involved in cinema. Looking back, it was probably good that I didn’t attend a school. I know good filmmakers who didn’t attend, and on the other hand there are people who went through the curriculum, and it was also very good for them. In countries like tiny Israel for instance, there are around 13 to 15 film schools. Even for me, as someone who looks for new talent, it’s very rare to look outside of these schools. Normally my way of finding films is that I watch short films from different film schools. And even when I am extremely thorough when looking for new talent, I am not able to watch all the short films from FAMU. I ask people to give me the best short films. And sometimes, like for example, Sam Spiegel, a very good film school in Jerusalem, showed me what they considered their three best shorts of the year, which were really good ones. There was one they didn’t promote, and it was the one which was selected for Cannes. It won the first prize for the best student film in the world — *Anna*, by Or Sinai at Cannes (in 2016).

This was also somewhat the strategy of Cannes. They wanted to show off their power as a festival and they didn’t want to be dictated by the national institutions.

Yes, and I think they are right, because as with this example of Sam Spiegel, perhaps their perspectives differ as to what the festival wants to see. What I want to say is that the film schools are clearly a new path for people who want to make films. Of course, there are gates, because there always were and will be. Somehow it’s more demo-

3) Both mentioned films — *Dust of the Ground* (Vít Zapletal, 2015) and *Journey to Rome* (Tomek Mielnik, 2015) — were premiered at the East of the West competition section of KVIFF 2015, *Journey to Rome* was the Opening Film of the section.

cratic, you can also apply if you are coming from nowhere. But it doesn't take away some mental barriers or social barriers.

The other thing at present is that there are categories in the field of film production. These are sub-fields, art house films and on the other hand — let's use the French expression — “D'art et d'essai”. Sometimes, we even speak about the art-house mainstream, these being the sort of films which are in some way like commercial cinema, because they have their own audience, their own appeal. Perhaps this is not so surprising. Is dividing those two things somehow important for you? Is it something you think about?

Well, I don't really think about these categories, even though I am very aware they exist and shape the discourse on films. What interests me is the expression of a personality or a movement, people that embody some streams that are taking place in society. Depending on their sensibility they begin to make films in different ways. It doesn't make one less personal than the other. If they start with the idea of delivering a product, this is a mainstream approach. In art-house films, however, there could be just as much a replication of old recipes, which are completely devoid of any originality, as in commercial cinema. I am looking everywhere for originality. Yesterday in Karlovy Vary⁴⁾ there were so many examples of projects that lacked originality in my view. They were visions that didn't testify to anything genuine, didn't have some kind of urgency to make films. And that's what I am looking for, because people have different sensibilities. We had a film of TorinoFilmLab in Cannes, *Raw*, which was a kind of cannibal film and because of the director's sensitivity to this type of horror cinema, the appeal for the audience was huge. The approach, however, was a personal one. We had *The Lunch-*

box, which was a great success all over the world, specifically because of the way the director Ritesh Barta sees the world. His sensibility is something that can cross many borders and can touch many people.

You talk about mainstream art-house. There are some people, who have in a way developed a specific type of cinema over the course of their career. Initially, their work appealed to a very limited number of people, but then they became a brand and the brand could be called mainstream. Some examples like this are Pedro Almodóvar and Lars von Trier. Their 3 or 4 first films were for a very limited audience, but now they are the two in Europe who reach a mainstream audience, because they became a product themselves. The same goes for Woody Allen. For me these categories exist, but also because it is easier to talk about these categories, than to talk about an original or genuine approach. Cinema theatres are full of franchises, which are just replicas of products. If you look at Japan's box office, the ten-highest grossing Japanese films were also a by-product of something that existed before. Like, I don't know, *Pokemon* adaptations. Perhaps there is some originality inside, but they are sold as a product from the very beginning.

I completely understand and agree, but the thing is that for theoretical feedback these categories are needed. It's not enough just to say, I like original films. I mean of course, it's okay for your thinking. The thing is that this democratization you talked about, also brings democratization in reflecting films. Chatting on social networks is changing the way cinema is evaluated in the public space.

Now we only remember the big names only, but there were many other filmmakers active in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. It was a period when only a few people wanted to make things differ-

4) M. Darras means upcoming films from CE Europe presented in Work In Progress pitching. List of projects in the 2016 edition online: <<http://www.kviff.com/en/film-professionals/book-of-projects/works-in-progress/2016>> [accessed 10 April 2018].

ently, even if they were the ones most likely to be remembered. It was a very small group and you could recognize them easily. In Argentina at present for instance, there might be more than 15,000 film students in a given year. Such a huge amount of people that want to make films, even though the social prestige and its impact on cinema is decreasing, but still more and more people want to make films. There is no natural selection that exists, like in the past with a social milieu. There comes another kind of selection. But even with the selection and with the gatekeepers, there are too many films. People still manage to make films outside of any frames. I mean, it's incredible how many films are being made. And that's why I think the art-house category of cinema is irrelevant. The vast majority of these people are not part of any avant-garde movement. Most don't know anything about making films differently. There are many people who are similar in a way, that's why art-house cinema generally is less exciting than before and that's why there are many things that look alike, not only in Karlovy Vary, but everywhere. You see a great deal of films which look alike, so in a way this kind of product you talk about — mainstream cinema — it also completely exists in art-houses. This comes from what the initial call is, the motor to make films. I think many gatekeepers don't necessarily truly understand, why all these people make films. The fact remains that there is a large amount of people who want to become directors, and it doesn't result in better films. Festivals such as Karlovy Vary, San Sebastian, Locarno and Venice have existed for 60 years or more, and they have more films submitted each year. They cannot fill their slots, however, with as many appealing films as in the past. That's problematic.

And something like TorinoFilmLab does this kind of film selection. If you want, we can discuss to what extent we kind of shape, or not, the content of the films. It is a relevant discussion to have. The fact is that all the films we support appeal to festivals. This year we had 12 films ready

and almost all of them premiered at important festivals: 7 in Cannes and 3 in Berlin. That's why we gained in importance. For film-makers it's easy to see, considering how difficult it is to have a film in a festival. If they do the Lab, they might think their chances are much higher.

So why is it like that? Why are you so successful?

Well, what is exactly the added value? Did people become talented because the school is good or would they be talented anywhere they go, and they just happened to go to this one particular place? In our case, I think what we provide is a kind of partnership which is very beneficial for people. Because whenever there were new movements, they were always collectives. Mavericks are very rare and even if you look at examples of people who started by themselves, they were always connected to an already existing discussion. You can see it in new Romanian cinema. Although now, after 10 years, these directors all hate each other, at some point in the past they were talking together. What I find fantastic in TorinoFilmLab is that we are creating a community, a very international one. There is a sense of being part of a club even though this is a very open one. It's not like we have just 20 members, we have 500 people. I think what is special about TorinoFilmLab is that it's both European and international. We do welcome and nurture visions which are very different from each other, so we don't really have one controlled context. I am French and I brought my context from where I come from, but we have people from many countries in Europe. They are people who are very much looking at the future and new technology. People who have a link to a certain culture, people who really like to look at visual art. Like I said, the strength of this lab is that we manage to bring together different kinds of people and still make it run. Of course, it's also important that we have the financial means. Without the means we couldn't keep talent (both trainers and filmmakers) attached, because they wouldn't stay just for the sake of it.

You also support the films financially?

Yes. Not so many, but around 5 to 7 films a year with grants of 50,000 Euros on average. It is money, but it's not like we finance the film. Usually when they have a grant from us, it really helps them a lot. It's a mix of economic and symbolic power. We do something that is economic, but if tomorrow a random Chinese company gives the same amount as us to a film, it would not have the same impact. That's why some initiatives, which have some means, try to gain this symbolic power by adding people who are recognized in the field. For example, in the Arab world up until now, there are film institutes that work quite well towards that direction. They have the economic power and they try to bring the symbolic power as well. As concerns TorinoFilmLab, we have very few constraints. It's like a miracle, as long as it lasts, in the sense that we don't have to over-represent local projects. We do want to support Italian filmmakers, of course, but we are not tied to very restrictive quotas.

Do you mean there is an international context, not only from Europe, but there are influences from other continents?

Yes, but I don't mean it as the way it should be. I mean it in the way that you can be Czech and European and write in Prague, but you have different layers of belongings. You make a film and you work with people who are very close to you and usually they are from the same language group. But you also can gain a lot from other kinds of input, because other people simply have a different understanding of things, but also because it can bring new ideas. I mean, it's a constant exchange. Some people are a little bit reluctant about it, but I think they are less and less so. The reality of artistic breakthroughs has often been about circulation of ideas. That's what I like with these kinds of new movements — concretized by initiatives such as labs: they are completely global. People from very different parts of the world can enrich one another. Of course,

there are some negative aspects connected to it. And I hope we are not at this point with TorinoFilmLab. I don't think we are. I would bet anyone to try to see the commonality in the TorinoFilmLab films with that which are now screened in Karlovy Vary. With Sundance Lab, it used to be more obvious to spot what a Sundance film was. Because it's a much more American point of view, the projects are predominantly American. There are very few international projects that are selected for Sundance. And even if America itself is a big melting point, it's still a certain way of looking at things, so there is a kind of style attached to it. TorinoFilmLab is something else, because we bring people together — I mean the trainers and directors — with very different approaches to cinema. I think it's also my job to bring this. We have a tutor, who has been very much influential in the Romanian new wave; a screen writer, who conceptualized the idea of Romanian minimalism that everybody copies now. We have Italian tutors, who specialize in TV series. We have a Swedish tutor, who was very instrumental in developing the Scandinavian series of novels *Milennium* into a mini-series. We do really try to bring very different approaches together in one lab.

I understand you select projects in accordance with your personal taste and you focus on original, surprising films. Is there something general you can say as to what is the most usual problem with the projects, the weak points?

Depending on the way you ask, I have different answers. Some are very practical, others more philosophical and so on. There are many ways to answer that question. But one thing is not to underestimate the sort of self-esteem, the self-confidence which brings you the solidity to make some daring moves in your script. This is a rare quality. Making daring moves doesn't have to mean you do something experimental. It's also about creating contrasts. There are practical things to be done for different projects. The Lab is

made up of very exhausting and intensive sessions, working on the script predominantly, because we focus mostly on the stories. We do have input about the audio-visual approach, but it's not the main aspect. Sitting at a table and imagining what the film will be like is still the easiest way to talk about cinema. I think we bring the teams some kinds of feelings which are difficult to measure, such as the previously mentioned self-confidence and self-esteem. And we do provide a symbolic value. There are many gatekeepers, but many actually don't really know what to select. So even the gatekeepers have to be told what is good and what isn't, because it requires a lot of confidence to be able to say what has potential, and what has less potential. Personally, I have no problem with it, partly because I have a background as a film critic, during which I exercised a permanent process of critical thinking. And there is even something else that has to do with being the right fit. There are many projects that make sense, but I am not in favour of having them in the lab. Yesterday, for example, at Pitch and Feedback⁵⁾ there was a film which really makes a lot of sense in terms of Slovak cinema since it will be a children's film. I think there are only a few children's films in Slovakia⁶⁾.

And it's not suitable for the international scene, you mean? It's just important as a Slovak project, if I understand.

Yes, in this sense we are looking for people who are really more in the field of cinema as an art. We are looking for people who want to experiment, who have artistic aims. What's important to say is that it doesn't mean that a lab is the only way. There are many people who do not have to go through a lab. Perhaps sometimes people force themselves, because they see that it brings results.

If they are not convinced, however, it doesn't make all that much sense.

Institutions like film funds push us often nowadays to attend labs. If you apply for funding, for example, for development from the Czech Fund, you have to name the workshops or trainings you are going to attend...

This is because the decision-makers — to come back to my point — don't necessarily know how to assess projects. They would never say it. It's not something that is easy to catch, what can develop into a great film or not. You need to work hard to study what's going on around. You have to watch a lot of films; you have to see if this is what you've seen many times before. What is truly original and what is not. And it's not like there is only one truth about what is good and what is not good of course.

You say that somebody doesn't necessarily need this training, but then it's more complicated for him or her to get to the market. It's easier even for those who don't need it from an artistic point of view but for networking, as a label, as a prestigious reference. And it can help them later to be selected in official selections of festivals.

Yes, they think that they can get something they cannot get any other way. Of course, I say it's not for everybody and it's not for every film, because most of the films end up being made regardless. No matter which workshop it is. But I still think they can gain from all kinds of experiences. You need to obtain a kind of process of distancing yourself from the project and someone who helps you to see your project. The lab is not the place for the creative process to be taken over by someone instead of someone else. I think the dubious workshops — and they do exist — are where peo-

5) Another example of industry event at KVIFF. This one is devoted to films in very early stage of development. List of projects of the 2016 edition online: <<http://www.kviff.com/cs/filmovi-profesionalove/book-of-projects/pitch-feedback/2016>> [accessed 10 April 2018].

6) *Summer with Bernard* (project in development, Martina Saková).

ple impose what they think on someone else. Perhaps they think there is only one way to make films and maybe sometimes they don't know any other way. It leads to very poor labs, however, where people get confused, because they are given a certain input. And if they respect the person who provided such input, they are even more confused, because it's really contradictory. A good lab is also a place where we try to have a deep understanding and really listen. And for this you also need an international context, you need a kind of specialisation. That's why I like us to have different people, because you cannot expect someone to have an understanding for a comedy about racism in Malaysia if that person doesn't know or doesn't learn about the context. For example, with a film like *Alois Nebel*, it's quite problematic if the trainer doesn't know about the history of Germans in the Czech Republic. We need a variety of people, who can be close to the local context. But there are different entries to a film. It's also good to have some contrast, people who say things which are universal to the story. It's quite complicated, it needs a lot of energy and listening, but if you impose some ready-made solutions, it doesn't work. That's why I think some filmmakers, who went to such places, believe labs are disruptive and useless. And I understand that.

It seems like in this age of individuality you are somehow representing or reviving the collective spirit.

The concept of specialisations has developed very strongly. People active in making films will perhaps have trouble trusting professors of cinema, who are not actively involved in the process. That's why I like to have different kinds of trainers, trainers who do trainings all year long, but also people, who do it just occasionally to refresh their practice. I don't like trainings where it's only full-time trainers involved. Because they can become too far removed from the reality of making films. We have script consultants, who don't write scripts themselves, but others who can tell what it

is like to write a script. At the same time, there are some training initiatives for producers, where the producers involved spend most of the time doing trainings, so at some point it's a problem. Like pitching trainers. This profession doesn't make much sense to me. I know that it requires a lot of skills, but I mean this sense of specialisation has prevented people from passing their knowledge on to new generations. Because people feel like there should be other people who do it instead of them if they share too much. And in a way the labs even accentuate this. That's why I created NISI MASA and have not specialised myself, because I always liked to meet people who are filmmakers, who want to become critics, some people who are — I don't know — studying biology but they want to express themselves about films. I think it's quite missing at present, this more humanistic approach.

What is the position of festivals in this? In the field of film production, cultural production?

The festivals have less and more power at the same time. They have less power, similarly to film critics having less power, because getting the main prize in Karlovy Vary will not really affect the film. For me, for many festivals, these kinds of competitions became a little bit senseless, because they do not actually mean anything except that it's a nice game, such as having a jury and so on. Festival competitions don't help the films, because they are disconnected from the real world. There will be a little news about the main award, about this Italian film, but it doesn't mean that Czech people will want to see it because it was in Karlovy Vary, so it definitely has much less power. I don't know if in the past they had more power, I think they did. At the same time, they are powerful, because they are kind of gatekeepers in the sense that if you had a film in Karlovy Vary, very likely, the filmmaker will have much more of a chance to make a new film in terms of access to public funding. It is disconnected from whether the film will be seen or not. Festivals also have

more power, because they took on these activities that were made before in closed circles, in the way I described. That's why they developed this market, that's why they developed this residence, these trainings, so it's more and more "the place to be" for people who want to make films. I don't mean to be too critical. For me a festival is a place I really love because you feel the vibe of the people, who are passionate about cinema, it's really still the place for that.

Why is the Cannes festival the leading one?

Because I think there is one unique specificity of France — and what is worrying me is that it is changing right now — and this is that you have people in very key positions, really powerful gatekeepers, who are film literate. They have strong cultural and important economic powers. And for many historical or cultural reasons festivals like Berlin could never play this part. In Cannes, you have an extended dialogue between the programmers (I was a programmer for Cannes for 7 years) and producers — producers in France are film buffs. Even the sales agents are. There can be a discussion together and this doesn't exist to such an extent in other countries. It creates a direct link when you can talk to a guy from Colombia, who is making his first film, who was always passionate about Abbas Kiarostami or Maurice Pialat. It is an asset for a festival like Cannes. This is the general environment. But there are also very practical reasons as to why it's leading. It managed to go along with the process of a festival having to be a business place, which Venice, for example, didn't manage. It is kind of similar to other fields of culture. The French understood that you need to have big luxury brands in terms of fashion and perfumes, and they are leading this field. It doesn't mean that the Italian products aren't as good but they still stay very local, working with smaller companies. As a matter of fact, for the last 15 years, most of the Italian luxury products were bought by large French corporations. In cinema, it's the same. In the early 1980s,

the equivalent of HBO was Canal+, and the people leading Canal+ were extremely into cinema and therefore they supported people like David Lynch. That's why he could make films, because Canal+ was financing them. It has been Cannes or Paris, because Cannes is Paris, it's the place which has been welcoming filmmakers from all over the world. Paris is a place where you could see Abbas Kiarostami on the street, where filmmakers were completing their films — much more than in any other place.

And what is worrying is that it is changing, because in the case of Canal+, in the last years there's been a major shift with people not coming with this traditional cinema-oriented background, but more from management and finances. Cannes is also strong because we had a very strong continuity in terms of funding. It did not matter if the government was left wing or right wing, they supported cinema and there was a good mix between the public and private domains. We have these large corporations that support different kinds of films. They can support Xavier Dolan and they can also support comedy. It's not like in most countries where big corporations would never invest in art films. You can't imagine a private TV channel like Nova in the Czech Republic investing in Karel Vachek or in Petr Václav. But it does exist in France. Maybe not the equivalent of Nova, but you have private channels doing this. There are many reasons that make Cannes Cannes. A practical one as well is that relatively few films are shown in Cannes — 100 at most, whereas more than 300 are shown in Berlin. It's very much diluted.

How does a festival, let's say Cannes, view TorinoFilmLab? What do they think about you? What do you mean for them from their perspective?

TorinoFilmLab is pretty new so I think that there are even some parts of Cannes where people don't know what TorinoFilmLab is. There are some other parts we even collaborate with so they know us well. These things are not systematic;

there are some programmers who are completely disconnected from the way films are being made. They are traditional film critics, who are not interested in how you shoot or how you achieve such a result. When I was a programmer, some of my colleagues were like that, but for me, I am much more connected to how things come into being. If I would see in the credits that this film got Eurimages, or this film was in TorinoFilmLab or this film was supported by Busan Academy, it does mean something to me. It means something to me, but it doesn't lead to a selection — it's only a piece of information. The truth is that in reality films coming out of nowhere are almost inexistent. It doesn't happen anymore, films that were completely made on their own. People believe it's a matter of proximity and in a way, it's true, but it's a story of chicken and egg — what came first. It's true that Cannes takes more films which are co-produced by French producers, but maybe it's because French producers achieve good projects first and foremost. Cannes is not a closed entity, people who work for Cannes also work for other things. For example, there is a famous figure of Cannes, his name is Pierre Rissient. He used to be the artistic advisor for the festival. He travelled a lot, especially in Asia, and discovered films by Hou Hsiao-Hsien or Edward Yang in Taiwan, etc. Actually, there was a time when this idea of festivals discovering films meant something — but this is long gone. Because now the people who discover films are the labs and/or the sales agents. The festivals come after.

Why have the labs replaced the festivals in this role?

They don't replace the festivals, because the labs are part of the festivals — Sundance lab is Sundance festival, Cannes initiated a residence, etc. Up until 1968, countries proposed the films to Cannes, so they were doing the pre-selection. That's why the Directors' Fortnight was created, because they realized there were some talented people, who didn't get access to the festival, be-

cause the national entity was deciding which films to propose. Today so many people have access to the festivals and it has changed so much that you see a film immediately, even before it's finished.

What is the position of Czech films, Czech cinema in all this? How do you view it if you compare it with other nations, what are the tendencies here?

In terms of new talent, innovation, original stories and so on, the Czech Republic is a place where quality decreased enormously over the last 20 years in the field of fiction. Because I think Czech cinema suffered a lot where the most talented people, talented DoP's and technicians, have remained, but did not work on Czech films but on foreign productions shot locally. This is, I think, one of the reasons. Another reason is that, compared to some countries, normal commercial cinema has a lot to say about non-commercial cinema and it really affects the way the stories are being told. I also think that Czech Republic works a little bit like an island. People say that they prefer to be the kings of a little kingdom than just a prince of something bigger. They don't want to travel, because they don't want to confront themselves with new challenges and because they can be the kings in this little country. In places like Argentina or Romania you couldn't be looking for anything, because you have no access. In Argentina, the economy has completely collapsed, in Romania it was completely a monopoly of communist dinosaurs... In a way, in the Czech Republic it is good for the people, but bad for creative energy. There's been much more transition between generations and you have had much more continuity between communism and post-communist times, because many filmmakers could work through institutions like FAMU, even though they were blacklisted in the 1970s and 1980s. Karel Vachek is now a teacher and it used to be Věra Chytilová. There is this continuity between generations, but at the same time it didn't help the filmmakers be rebellious. They

could do advertisements, there are massive advertising opportunities coming to Prague. They could do these big budget shootings, so I think it really didn't help their creativity. I think this has been realized somewhat, and it has begun to change over the last five years. People who are like 25/35-years-old have more or less decided not to be part of it. It's kind of symptomatic that in TorinoFilmLab we only ever had two Czech filmmakers so far; one of them lives in France and the other one is originally from Slovenia: Petr Václav and Olmo Omerzu.

I think it's changing really fast and it's good that it changes in all fields and subfields. It's changing in the Film Fund which is richer and people there are respected. The first change was at FAMU 15 years ago with Michal Bregant as the new dean, who started this new generation. Karel Vachek has been the head of the documentary department since 2001. It's a combination of more things, so I am sure there are more and more people who are applying for TorinoFilmLab from the Czech Republic.

Yes, you're right. It's changing, but maybe not as much and as rapidly as one would hope.

Radim Procházka