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JUST TALKING WEDNESDAY, MARCH 21

Another interesting meeting between directors and their colleagues and the audience took place on Wednesday, March 21 in the context of Just Talking, of the 9th Thessaloniki Documentary Festival - Images of the 21st Century. The participants were Paul Taylor (We Are Together / Troubled Innocence), Jennifer Fox (Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman / Special Screenings), Anna Kessiosoglou (Coupapiti: White Man in a Deep Hole / Views of the World). Joining them was Alina Tutoveanu, a buyer for Rumanian television.

Alina Tutoveanu began the conversation, describing how from 1989 Rumanian television only broadcast 2 hours a day, so there was no room for showing documentaries. Over the last five years she has tried to create an audience for documentaries mainly of a cultural nature. Next, Paul Taylor explained how he had worked as a volunteer at a South African orphanage, which is at the centre of his film, without having had the intent of filming it. When he decided to make a film about it and the children who live there, he was already emotionally involved because of the intimacy he had developed with them from the time he lived there. For this reason he was very anxious as to whether he would manage to create a fair portrait of them. The process ended up being an intensely emotional and exhausting for him, since he felt the children's pain and sadness deeply.

On the other hand, Jennifer Fox, speaking about how she decided to make a documentary which looks at what it means to be a woman today, said that it all began 10 years ago. "I realized that the discussions I had with my women friends were the center of my life. Men came and went, but the women were always with me. This is how I started exploring the invisible thread that connects women from every corner of the planet, and the communication that they develop so easily without regardless of how well they know each other. I also wanted to film these discussions without destroying the intimacy, so I thought of passing the camera hand to hand, so that the cyclical nature of women's conversation can be shown."

The Briton Paul Taylor then explained how he drew strength from the children he filmed when he had to face a personal tragedy. "Seeing these children dealing with the loss of their loved ones with such strength and dignity influenced me to a great extent, something I didn't expect. You see, I happened to lose my father two months after returning from South Africa. And in the end I think I managed to deal with it much better exactly because these children had inspired me so much".

The American Jennifer Fox, for her part, noted that the whole process of shooting was a constant risk for her. "I was looking for fellow travellers and I was clearly affected by the countless women I met on the way". Her camera's wanderings through 17 countries led to specific conclusions, about which the director Marco Gastine, who was in the audience, expressed objections. "The film is a master piece and you must not miss it. The first... 347 minutes of the film are excellent, however I disagree with the last five! Because I grew up with women, all these years I thought we were about the same, and unfortunately I left the theater feeling that we belong to two different species.

The partner and one of the leading characters of Jennifer Fox's film, Patrick Lindenmaier, expressed his own different point of view: "It convinced me to participate and the truth is that I was reluctant at first. In the end I liked the result, even though I still have a different view on the matter. But naturally it is a film, which has a different substance of its own".

The Greek Anna Kessiosoglou stated that she started to deal with the subject of immigration and arriving in Australia she discovered that her subject was different from the one she expected. She discovered that the Greek community living in the Cooper Pedi area lived underground, while the geological particularities of the wild and impressive landscape that surrounded them had deeply influenced their way of life.

Then the discussion turned to the issue of production and financing. Anna Kessiosoglou admitted that because of the foot dragging she was faced with from her sponsors, she had to give a portion of the film's rights to people with whom she worked, and to use her own money.

"Luckily, I believe we will at least get back our expenses and the value of our work. However, given the state of financing in Greece at this point in time, that is, the Greek Film Center won't give you money, nor a television station, there is not much you can do. One solution is technological progress with lighter and cheaper cameras, or the cheaper processing and editing of the material. Unfortunately, this way the quality is not very good, but its preferable for a story that must be told to be told, even if you have to compromise on quality".

Paul Taylor faced the same problem, since Being Together was his first film and he started with what was essentially a zero budget. "We managed to do it with credit cards and the generosity of some friends. We got the Channel 4 financing when we were half way through the process, something which enabled us to finally hire the exceptional editor of Trainspotting, giving him 1/6 of his usual salary". He is also a defendant of digital technology. He mentioned that there is a rapidly falling market trend in production financing, and he mentioned his own experience he had with his film. "From the moment we started the financing negotiations until we finished the amounts they were giving us kept dropping, while I realized with terror with what delay we would be getting that money".

Jennifer Fox confirmed what her colleagues had said. "Exactly because there are more and more – but unfortunately not better – American films produced, the per capita amount that we get keeps getting smaller. There are a great many directors who have not managed to get in

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the door, and this is why I often tell them that we must open up and become international in our views. Europe, for instance, has some interesting cases of financing as well as some very good stories that must be told"

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