

ANOTHER CONCEPTION OF CINEMA

By Charlie Van Damme, director of photography, AFC

Let's consider a hypothetical world where all literary output gradually centred on a single nation except for a few residual poles whose limited influence would progressively diminish. We would have to ask ourselves what literature could possibly deserve this exorbitant privilege and, above all, what other literatures would have to be sacrificed. And then imagine what happens when the literature of this nation, carried by its deadly dynamic, reigns supreme: what would be left for it to destroy except itself?

No, that seems improbable as long as we associate literature and any form of artistic expression with the circulation of ideas, this joyous cacophony of exchange and reciprocal influence which continues to increase as the world opens up to itself. Yet, the situation in the film world over the last 30 - 40 years has been one of total imbalance as described above, and it's getting worse all the time.

With reference to the cinema, French critic Serge Daney said, "the condition sine qua non for there to be image is otherness." To make images is to create a bond. Indeed, that is where I principally, but not exclusively, derive my pleasure as a cinema-goer: being confronted with otherness, trying to accept it, understand it, gain a feel for it, recognize something of myself, and thus know myself better. It's the same pleasure that I look for when I'm doing my job as a lighting cameraman, trying, with others, to make a contribution to the common goal so that others might tap into the emotions we feel on set.

Whether the tone be serious or playful, whether we're talking about fiction or documentary, the cinema participates in its way, alongside the other arts, human sciences, so-called exact sciences, religions and philosophy in this outsize objective that can never be totally fulfilled: shining a light on the opacity of the world, revealing its uniqueness in diversity. By its very nature, it cannot be the expression of a dominant viewpoint and can, on the contrary, only be nourished by a multiplicity of points of view. In other words, harmony is not boiling everything down to one thing, it is harmonizing differences.

Campaigning for a cinema that addresses the sensitivity, intelligence and imagination of audiences, for a cinema that creates bonds, cannot be to campaign for French cinema or European cinema against US cinema. That would be to place the debate on hostile ground and self-defeating. We can only campaign for a multiplicity of cinematic forms on a planetary scale.

That's the idea that I intend to explore, in the knowledge that it won't solve the immediate problems confronting us, but I remain convinced that we can progressively take the initiative and influence the course of events in a specific way.

It's with that in mind that I circulate this text, in the hope that it will give rise to some kind of critical feedback so that we can get down to work.

You might recall the large-scale demonstrations by freelance technicians and artists ("intermittents du spectacle"), particularly those working in the theatre, in defence of their status and rights, that marked France in 2003. What emerged was the very unpleasant feeling of a genuine "poverty in the arts world": nobody commits to action that could, rightly or wrongly, be interpreted as an act of sabotage or suicide, unless driven by despair. So much so that we could talk, from a social point of view, of an economic disaster area, and wonder why production companies who are themselves living from hand to mouth didn't join the movement, for it is almost certainly the same factors that make life so difficult for all of us.

Wednesday, November 5 of the same year will stand out in the history of film distribution. That day, a blockbuster, the Wachowski Brothers' "The Matrix Revolutions" opened in 50 countries, almost like the simultaneous broadcast of a major sporting event. For the French market alone, 800 prints were made and as many screens monopolized by this picture alone, giving us an insight into what film distribution will be as soon as digital technology allows (cables, satellite, theatres equipped with HD).

That same day in Paris, three new pictures were available on just two screens each: "Lovely Rita", an Austrian movie by Jessica Hausner, "Le Serviteur de Kali", a French-Indian coproduction by Adoor Gopalakrishnan, and "Bye Bye Africa" by Mahamet Saleh Haroun, the first Chadian film ever made. The subject of this latter film is how hard it is to be a filmmaker in a country like Chad, how hard it is to

express oneself and find an audience -- in terms of production and diffusion -- and what the job actually means. What chance do these films coming from more or less exotic other places stand against the blockbuster "The Matrix Revolutions"? Rarely has "blockbuster" seemed a more appropriate term, in the sense of a bomb that pulverizes all around it. A term that seems more pertinent to military conquest and destruction than to the idea of diffusing works of art.

The cinema is a costly artistic undertaking which, more than any other, separates out filmmakers according to the access they have to technology, infrastructure and money. But this inequality alone does not explain the absolute dominance of American cinema, nor the increasing fragility of other countries' movie industries. Up until the 1950s - 60s, many other countries could still boast a vibrant national industry. So what has happened in the last half century for us to reach this state of affairs?

The forces that threaten the cinema are many and various but it is above all via those linked to production and distribution structures that people try to influence things, probably because they can be expressed in figures which give the appearance of an objective truth. French film production is, from this point of view, a good example in the sense that it remains fairly constant in volume thanks to an elaborate system of subsidies in production, distribution and creation; that this system has inspired those of most European countries and is aimed to incorporate countries beyond Europe (Le "Fonds Sud"). The system was born shortly after WWII with the aim of helping an ambitious industry, protecting the overall profession from overseas competition, particularly from the US, and, later, to make up for the loss of audiences from theatres to television by obliging TV channels to invest massively in movie production (the quota system). Basically, the aim is to protect national film production from the impact of competition and the free market.

But one question has to be asked: why was it necessary to protect cinema first in France and Sweden and then across the whole of Europe when it thrived pre-war on almost every continent without any help? And why is it still not necessary in India and the United States?

Let's try the following bold hypothesis: after the war, a whole system of complex and possibly contradictory values and symbols was shaken and gradually eroded, drying up the well from which films were created. As if the past was no longer a springboard towards the future. We could quote at random the grandeur of nations and their history, patriotism and legitimate combat against neighbouring countries, the certitude of unstoppable scientific and social progress, the belief in or opposition to the so-called civilizing mission in the colonies, and religious values as opposed to materialist convictions. The *coup de grace* was undoubtedly the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet bloc, which called into question a whole section of European thought: Marxism.

This hypothesis seems to hold true in Germany and Italy immediately after the war. It took over 20 years for German cinema to rediscover even a fraction of its former dynamism with the *Filmverlag der Autoren*, because it was also the world of ideas that had been destroyed. In Italy, on the other hand, neo-realism immediately redynamized the cinema in an extraordinarily inventive way, beyond national borders even. Filmmakers were rich in convictions, rooted in left-wing ideas, that fascism had been unable to stifle. As for the USA, their conviction of being on the side of dynamism, truth, justice and good could only be reinforced. The war wasn't a turning-point for them and nor was it, apparently, in India. This is undoubtedly a decisive element in the strength of US cinema and yet it could also be an element of weakness. Today, it is lacking the merest flicker of internal contestation of values and symbols, which is needed to maintain vitality and creativity long-term.

If it is increasingly difficult for non-American filmmakers to engage with and win over audiences, it isn't because their films are badly made, but rather because filmmakers and audiences are similarly in disarray, bereft of a past. This disarray is apparent on a planetary scale: almost 30 years ago, what shook the world could still rely on strong and "modern" convictions, such as Marxism and liberalism, decolonisation and the fight for freedom, independence, the right of people to self-determination, third worldism, the beat and hippie movements, pacifism, and liberation theology, which people could adhere to with complete sincerity. As many hopes and aspirations that have been dashed. So much so that nowadays we seem to have no other choice than between ultra-liberalism and violent bursts of regression: falling back on identity, ultra-nationalism, headlong flight into religious obscurantism, blatant racism and the resurgence of totalitarianism.

It is undoubtedly as much in terms of values and symbols as in terms of structures that the greatest effort must be made, and that directly concerns the work of creation and bonding with the public. Fortunately, the post-war period hasn't left only a void and deactivated former values but is in the process of creating something new that questions founding myths of civilizations that have been set in stone for millennia and whose trace is found in the West in the Book of Genesis. There, it was in the order of things that woman should be dominated by man. This is at last being contested by feminists and it's a huge step forward. For Françoise Héritier, fighting for "the admittance of women to equal dignity, to independence analogous to that of men and to the right of self-determination... is to undermine the fundamental principles that make all otherness not a difference that is recognized and accepted as a necessary complement of oneself but a category which is rejected, considered detestable and which must be dominated, constrained and even, potentially, destroyed", for it is "the ultimate barrier to the foundation of identity and difference" (Le Monde, 04/02/2002).

Humanity's place in nature is questioned by ecology. Human beings are no longer there to "multiply, replenish the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over every living thing upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28), they must now work with nature for they are part of it. Ecology also calls into question methods of production and consumption, and beyond that, the redistribution of wealth, human claims to omnipotence, people's blind faith in science and technology, the very notion of progress and, in particular, of unlimited growth. If it turns out to be true, as seems likely, that for the poorest to reach minimum living standards the richest must reduce their energy consumption, depending on the country, by 20 - 50% of what it is today, it is possible that we are heading straight for a major ecological catastrophe or for a war of everybody against everybody else to secure the means to consume still more, which amounts to the same thing.

The construction of Europe also deserves our attention. Whatever reservations one may have about the way it is being built, the bottom line is that it is an astonishing and very real concept to bring together peoples as diverse as the Slavs, Scandinavians, Latins, Germans, Anglo-Saxons, and perhaps Muslims in the near future (Turkey), with no relationship of domination, no bloody conquest, no violence at all, in fact. Not so long ago, these peoples were merrily slaughtering each other. This is a first in the history of humanity. Are we to believe that God is at last blessing the builders of the Tower of Babel rather than condemning them to incomprehension?

In any case, the importance of population movements in the context of globalization, apparently inevitable since the invention of the compass, forces us to reconsider our relationship to difference and to think of identity in multiple, open-minded terms rather than in a blinkered, restrictive way. There is also the question of exogamy, no longer asked at the family, village or regional level, but at the level of peoples and the planet.

Of course, there is resistance everywhere. Sometimes, it becomes very violent. A radiant future is far from assured. But it is important to take into account just how much these new propositions agitate the world and to use them as the bedrock both of our work and of our methods of production-diffusion in order to echo the hopes and fears of audiences. It will be pointless in any case to try, in a backward-looking, knee-jerk, sectarian reaction, to continue to rely on yesterday's symbols and values, that have become inoperative and counter-productive today. And yet, most output turns its back on these potential new paths, preferring to focus or even fall back on themes that are so culturally correct, inoffensive and very often petit-bourgeois. Could it be, however, the funding system that results in this unwillingness to take risks?

In "Imperialism", Hannah Arendt develops the following thesis: the motor of capitalism, its underlying principle if you wish, might not so much be the production of goods and riches in order to be able to enjoy them, but the permanent and unlimited expansion of profits constantly reinvested in this expansion and, consequently, producing beyond the capacity to enjoy the fruits of production and beyond, or irrespective of, real needs. More than perpetual movement, perpetual growth. This logic requires economic protagonists to consider their competitors as enemies whose expansion must be countered in order to protect one's own, who must be eliminated when the markets are saturated. A

limit is reached when an economic protagonist has ousted all others in his or her field: there is no further possibility of expansion, there has to be destruction in order to start over the cycle of expansion. The other, absolute limit is the finiteness of the planet. We already know that it can no longer absorb the pollution generated by the energy expended and, moreover, that reserves of fossil fuels will be exhausted in the next 30 - 40 years.

Permanent expansion (or growth) carries within it the principle of conquest, destruction and death as opposed to the idea of free exchange and free competition (in the sense of competing freely in the same aim). In every country, major companies are involved in a fight for dominance. In their eyes, "independents" are people from another planet who just don't get it and who one might at a push be tempted to mop up. On a planetary scale, the US's hegemony in movie production is constantly being reinforced, to the detriment of other countries' output. This perspective of conquest underpins the distribution strategy of "The Matrix Revolutions": occupying as much space as possible everywhere in the world and ousting everybody else.

The underlying principle of any artistic activity cannot be permanent expansion, conquest and ousting others. On the contrary, we need other people, competitors, to nourish us. There is no artistic activity that doesn't stem from exchanges, confrontations, mutual influences, joyous or fierce quarrels and the pitting of ideas against each other. We also need everybody else with and in their apparent difference. We need their history, fears, hopes, conflicts and relationships. Otherwise, what would our stories be made of?

There is an insuperable antagonism between an artistic approach and capitalist logic. It was possible for them to coexist for a while but we are dangerously close to reaching the limit. As long as we continue to act within this logic, we can only adopt a defensive attitude in the hope of delaying the moment of our own extermination. Cinema is by nature the meeting-point of art, craftsmanship, industry and economy, but there is no obligation to buy into a lethal, economic way of functioning. Do we have any other choice except to think up another economic approach based on exchanges and reciprocity? Based on the active support of other film cultures so that these exchanges can take place?

In other words, for cinema to stay alive in France, it needs to stay alive in Austria, India, Chad and everywhere else. That is what we must gradually work towards, most likely beginning with the affirmation, loud and clear, of this imperative in order to build momentum and get people working in this direction.

It may seem illusory to claim to be "in another place" economically when (almost?) all other activities on a global level are governed by this principle of unlimited growth that is so characteristic of capitalism. And a little unrealistic when you consider what is at stake financially and politically. Didn't people declare, after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, that this was definitive proof that only capitalism was operational, that it was the natural way for humans to function, and that it was an unbeatable model that alone could bring about happiness on earth? Why not just "go with it"?

The affirmation that a way of interacting or thinking is definitive, complete and unbeatable is typical of a dogmatic, totalising way of thinking. One of its effects is to inhibit thought, since it asserts that there is nothing truly new left to discover. It also encourages censorship of varying degrees of blatancy: whatever might be discovered could undermine the dogma. Each time a totalising way of thinking has claimed to govern the world, reality emerges to contest its rule. This is what is happening now. We know that the gulf between rich and poor is getting wider and that it is impossible to ensure equality in the market place between a Senegalese farmer and a French one. We also know that if the health industry is run in terms of profit, AIDS will win. Anti-globalization militants are not the only ones making themselves heard. Within the WTO itself, there is contestation. On all sides, there are proposals for "another place" economically. Situating cinema in "another place" is possible as long as this action is seen as part of a much vaster action we can rely upon to provide mutual support. Not taking this path simply leaves the way open for the fatal antagonism between unbridled ultra-liberalism and regressive, obscurantist forces.

In the early 20th century, cinema was seen as a universal art. In fact, it developed as the last refuge of national art. The switch from silent to talkies is partly responsible but even then dubbing and subtitling should have ensured universality. Also, this doesn't explain the success of American cinema, unless one attributes its worldwide dominance to its movie industry's overwhelming firepower, which is far too simplistic.

Let's try another explanation, starting with the following thumbnail sketch of recent history: the dominant epicentre on a global level, as much from an economic viewpoint as scientifically, militarily, commercially, philosophically and culturally, was made up of a core of European countries between whom existed strong antagonistic tensions with each country trying to assure its supremacy and protect its sphere of influence. So, it was quite natural for the cinema to become a "national" art and, later, for the assistance given to the cinema to be adapted to national circumstances and, where necessary, to those of the sphere of influence, thus reinforcing the "national" character of cinematic art. However, at the same time, the epicentre was beginning to shift (from 1914-18) towards the USA. Since WWII, this shift has become complete. America is dominant. And we filmmakers have got into the bad habit of taking up a position in relation to the epicentre, anxious to defend the national bastion. And yet other centres are emerging and weigh heavily: Asia and the other Europe that is under construction, to which might be added centres that are in the process of developing, such as South America, the Arab world and Africa.

Let's say we take a gamble on the break-up of the epicentre. What if we were to set our sights on an interim horizon that would be a multipolar world where the cinema would participate, alongside other sectors of activity, in the circulation and exchange of goods and ideas, as is already the case in painting, dance, music and the major works of literature? To achieve this, it would be necessary to open up further to new themes and forms, that may not yet be invented, and, above all, cease to see the world from an ethnocentric point of view in order to participate in these exchanges.

We come back to the idea that for cinema to thrive in France, it must thrive in Chad and everywhere else. Then, we can envisage a new economic form, based for instance on the concept of fair trade. A long-term goal, to be sure.

Systems of aid to the cinema undoubtedly have a beneficial effect on production. The argument that protecting filmmakers from the rigours of the market simply turns them into charity cases accountable to no one does not stand up. We do not live in the lap of luxury. If there is a cinematic form that is relatively protected, like a besieged citadel, it is exploratory and experimental cinema that is necessary to the vitality of the industry as a whole, in the same way as R&D is essential to manufacturing. At the very most, we can say that this research is faltering for we are unsure what its aims should be and in which directions it should develop. This is surely linked to the fact that, for the time being, there is a lack of systems of strong values and convictions that drive us to act in one direction rather than another, unlike those that favoured the emergence of neo-realism, the New Wave and the political militancy of Italian, British and US filmmakers in the wake of May '68 and, more recently, in China and Iran.

On the other hand, the overbearing participation of TV channels in film production poses a problem because it has become decisive and, apparently, indispensable.

These channels, with the exception of ARTE (for how much longer?), receive most of their income from commercials. The point of a programme, whatever it may be, is first and foremost to capture the largest possible audience who will then be ready to lend its attention to the only message that really counts: that of the advertisers. And so, a programme's quality is evaluated strictly in terms of quantity. As a result, the channels support mostly, if not exclusively, projects that are considered best able to meet the expectations of an audience of undifferentiated consumers. The aim is to be sure of pleasing the greatest number by rubbing them up the right way and, if necessary, appealing to their lowest inclinations, rather than trying to meet them halfway even if it means taking the risk of having to persuade and convince. Securing investment from a major channel is only possible nowadays by respecting certain models, or pre-established codes, and fitting into the mass-media mould. That leads filmmakers to work less for their natural audience -- in theatres -- and more for the advertisers. And the drain of audiences from theatres continues unchecked.

We can't suddenly refuse funding from channels by adopting a radical-puritan attitude, but to persist in holding out a begging bowl to them amounts to selling our souls. This is the paradox we must resolve. There is no other solution than to work towards a reconciliation with audiences in theatres at home and abroad, near and far, in the knowledge that the US market is, by nature, off limits. We have to find someplace else. Once more, we must campaign for multipolar and reciprocal exchange.

It's strange how one comes to accept the unacceptable.

- Most French production companies no longer put their own money into films -- except in the form, occasionally, of the producer's cut of the budget. Nor will they take the risk of working without covering unforeseen expenses or by reducing their overheads to a minimum. Essentially, they act as a proactive interface between the director and sources of funding, which never vary: the CNC's advance against takings and the Fonds Sud, the TV channels (often several for a single movie), Eurimages, specialist funds (the Soficas), regional funds and one or several coproducers who will in turn apply to the sources they can access. This means that the director is confronted, via the producer, with several financial deciders (three, four, five or more), who all have their own, sometimes contradictory, agendas and input. How is it possible to bring them all into line -- when it only takes one to back out sometimes for the whole project to collapse -- if not by offering a compromise with each, at the risk of watering down the project?

- The protests against the proposed reform of the status of freelancers' social benefits ("le régime des intermittents du spectacle) have made public what everybody knew but kept quiet about: a serious slice of time worked is actually remunerated via unemployment welfare payments. The problem is that some films wouldn't get made and that some companies would go bust otherwise. On short films, nobody actually gets paid anymore. How did we come to accept this state of affairs as normal to the extent that we defend the current system on the basis that it is the only way to survive and the only way to uncover new talent? Doesn't it actually boil down to accepting poverty as the norm? It was a now-or-never opportunity forcefully to contest this "normalcy", especially when certain politicians decided to suggest that the French don't work enough and certain successful production companies also take advantage of the system.

- We also think it's normal that for reasons of audience share and advertisers' prime-time considerations, certain decisions that should be strictly artistic are imposed on filmmakers: the choice of certain actors and rejection of others, the nature and treatment of a subject, changes to the script to appeal to the broadest possible audience. In other countries at other times, it was the Party that made these decisions. Here and now, when all is said and done, it is the advertisers. Full-blown censorship is replaced by a more subtle variety but the result is exactly the same.

- Box-office results and numbers of admissions are published in league tables in the mainstream press. Does that help the public choose according to criteria of quality? No, it draws on a storekeeper's logic, whose only argument for the quality of his merchandise is, "I sell a lot of those, you know."

- We are constantly being told that deregulation is the all-important principle in exchanges and relations between human beings, and then everything will be fine. Except in the arts, say some. But why only in the arts?

Is it possible to imagine civilization without rules and laws?

Surely civilization is the establishment of a framework of rules so that life doesn't come down to a bloody free-for-all. By principle, deregulation is the negation of the very concept of civilization. It is entropy, general disorder.

Try deregulating traffic and see what happens.

- There is another massively growing phenomenon: the craze for reality shows, whose most abject expression is the snuff movie, and for the television spectacles that sports broadcasts have become. In both cases elements of (pseudo) reality are represented without the slightest subjectivity, with no point of view: audiences delight in conflicts that are (or seem to be) real without any sense of perspective. Light years away from a documentary, which is a vision and a sensitive interpretation of real life, and from fiction, which keys into our reflexive sensitivity so that catharsis can occur. This is a

regressive development which puts the public into the position of a voyeur and brings to mind the Roman empire's watchword of "Panem et Circences".

We are, all of us, apparently captivated by a complex, indeterminate entity where all power is exercised (what was previously known as "the system"). In spite of our reservations and criticisms, we don't know what alternative to envisage. What is most inhibiting, in fact, is the very possibility of imagining an alternative. We can't exhume the good old strategies of the clean break and a brighter, better future: they have already failed. There seems to be no other choice than to struggle on, increasingly isolated, in order to take up a bucket seat on the movie industry juggernaut. Cut off from each other, it may in fact be us who confer on the so-called system its omnipotence for we sketch its portrait.

Our professional bodies, who communicate infrequently with each other, deal above all with the concerns of their particular constituency. It may be that the ARP (French Association of Directors and Producers), by definition, goes furthest in exploring the links between direction, production and diffusion. Even so, it never questions the fundamental logic behind these links, at least not in public. Technicians' associations never venture beyond their members' sphere of activity other than to exchange strictly factual information (rules, figures, aid structures). They are mindful to avoid debate and taking up a position. The same goes for the trade press. "Le Film Français" concentrates on production. "Le Technicien du Film" talks technical. It wouldn't be a problem if the specialized press provided a forum for debate but the time has long since passed when the ideological rivalry between "Les Cahiers du Cinéma" and "Positif" got people thinking, talking and doing something.

Those were the days of fighting talk not talking shops. Nowadays, film magazines restrict themselves to analysis and reviews. They voice opinions that are so fundamentally similar it is almost impossible to tell them apart. And they all rally round success because they can't mention the latest blockbuster, even if it is in cautious and vaguely critical terms, if they wish to maintain or increase their circulation.

It is only in random conversation, when you dare to venture away from immediate concerns (the month's depressing figures, the lack of work, the project that seems destined never to get off the ground), that you realize that you are not alone in asking fundamental questions that touch on the meaning of our work and that segue into other, wider preoccupations; that we are not animated merely by egotism (the "every man for himself" that becomes "run for your life") but that we would like to take a long-term view on the basis of shared action and experience, inclusive movements and ideas. But all that seems so unimaginable.

Indeed, if we fight our battles on the ground of that which stymies us and the logic behind it (for example, the logic of the major commercial channels is irrefutable if we stick to their criteria of appreciation), we may as well admit defeat before we start. And then all we can hope for is to maintain the status quo as long as possible by tweaking- the system, which will enable some of us to carve out or conserve a place in the sun. But the statistics don't lie: less and less people are going to the movies. Then comes a moment when lucidity leads to despair or cynicism, when the horizon seems full of clouds, when we have taken on board this idea that the totalising thinking that governs the world is indeed omnipotent. No other reading of reality seems possible except that determined by this way of thinking.

If we determine, however, to occupy other ground in our thinking and action, we enable ourselves to see other horizons and to reach out towards them.

This text is intended as an appeal to begin moving towards this and to pool our energy to achieve it. Not simply as negative analysis based on the expression of critical positions but above all as positive action to develop new methods of interaction.

Without prejudice to ideas that take shape in the future, we can already lay down a few initial working hypotheses:

- First of all, the creation of a review (and a website) that will necessarily be international, as inclusive as possible and open to every section of the movie industry. Something like an "International Forum of the Cinema", rather than like some of these high-quality magazines that unfortunately refuse to go beyond their borders.

We should encourage in this review strong opinions and debate around themes we would like to be able to develop in our films; consider how best to develop them; explore those that would seem likely to move very diverse communities; bring out that which might unite as well as that which causes tension; question form, style and narrative structure for that maybe- one of the reasons that films that aim to create bonds don't meet with the success they deserve -- in other words, questions our relationship with the public; ask why, when we are courageous and sincere, we are so "unappealing"; integrate into our thinking cultural, economic, political and social contradictions and tensions; use this review to support "small" films and films that we like from other places, as well as reporting on movie-making activity in smaller producing nations.

- Achieve wider coverage of our convictions as and when they are forged by articles in the specialized and mainstream press, by contacts with journalists and critics as well as spreading the word to other filmmakers and the authorities to support our action aimed at the general public. The "public's tastes" don't exist as such, as if manufactured spontaneously. They result from the socio-cultural environment, the sub-conscious absorption of values and symbols, cultural practices, mass-media hype, education and so on. There is absolutely no reason why we, on a smaller scale perhaps, shouldn't influence these elements that shape the public's tastes, just like the legendary magazines of the New Wave did, most often indirectly thanks to the way they were (mis)represented in the mainstream press. In the same way, today, the popularity of values developed by the anti-globalization movement stems essentially from the way they are reported in the mainstream press and on TV.

- Support selected festivals, such as The Festival of Three Continents and Fespaco. Develop strong links with emerging nations cinematically and filmmakers in those countries. Gradually, bring influence to bear on national and international public bodies so that these countries can develop diffusion and distribution networks as well as production structures.

- Encourage alliances, in terms that need to be studied, between the numerous small independent production and distribution structures in order to make them stronger. Develop trans-national links between them, following the example of the Indie-Circle, an umbrella group of distribution companies including Ciné Art (Belgium), Frénétic (Switzerland), Lucky Red (Italy), Haut et Court (France) and A-Films (Netherlands).

- Create a label -- a kind of brand image -- like that, in France, of Cinéma d'Art et Essai or the Théâtre National Populaire.

- Hope it takes root and grows.

Obviously enough, there is no question of pre-judging the way one should open up to the world, consider classic themes or develop new ones. That is a job for each of us personally. But we can expect it to be enlivened by the intensity of the exchanges encouraged by this "structure".

If you want to support this initiative, please contact

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